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BAZAAR of the BIZARRE

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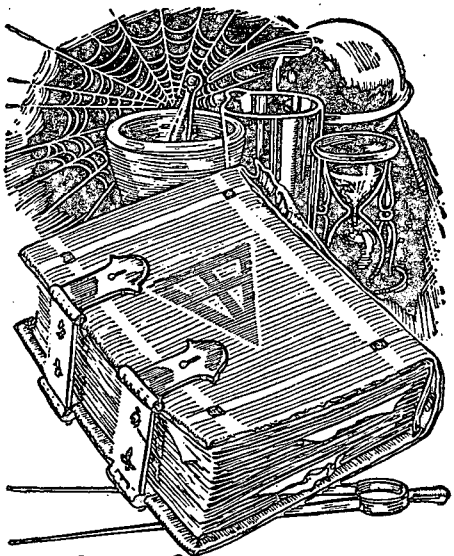

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FANTASTIC
STORIES OF IMAGINATION

AUGUST 1963
Volume 12 Number 8

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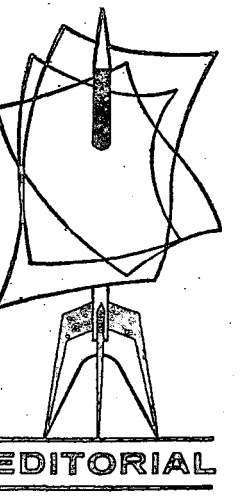

IF you are wondering why the glowering chap guarding the goodies of the bizarre bazaar on our cover is festooned with chin fuzz, lend an ear to the erudite Mr. Leiber, who recently had the Grey Mouser impale the following note on our bulletin board with his throwing knife:

"Speaking of the intriguing title you are putting on my story," writes Leiber, "perhaps the most bizarre point of all is that the word 'bizarre' comes from the Basque *bizar*, meaning simply, 'beard.' This, in turn, comes by way of the Spanish *bizarro*, meaning brave and gallant, no doubt by the association of the ideas 'beard' and 'manly.' Bizarre to wear a beard? Well, I guess so, some places. But bizarre to be manly and gallant? Perhaps so, today. If so, a fig for all your grey-flannel suits! The Mouser still prefers his loose gray silks and mouse-skins."

* * *

If we may turn serious for a moment, we'd like to pass on to you what we think is an important observation made by Prof. Abdus Salam, scientific adviser to the President of Pakistan, in a speech he made at a recent U.N. conference on the application of science for the benefit of under-developed nations. Stung by what he called the "cautious timidity" of scientists in the face of world problems, Salam said:

"For me, the real crisis of human affairs lies in this. Almost unthinkingly the scientist has created this modern world. By eliminating distance he has given a meaning to the concept of one world and reality to the concept of a single human family. By demonstrating that unlimited wealth can be created provided a base for it exists, he has invested mankind with the power to clean up all the slums on Earth. But, after doing all this, the scientist turns his back and entrusts the task of world development to those who still live and think in terms of an age of scarcity. His personal ideal still remains . . . splendid seclusion . . ."

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To the Gray Mouser, well-fed and wined in his black coffin, the scene was jolly. To Fafhrd, wearing the Cloak of Invisibility and the Blindfold of True Seeing, the scene was the hell-nadir of the universe, where dark devils scuttled and the damned writhed in the grip of black serpents. Thus did they defend Lankhmar against the invasion of the . . .

BAZAAR of the BIZARRE

By FRITZ LEIBER

Illustrator SCHELLING

THE strange stars of the World of Nehwon glinted thickly above the black-roofed city of Lankhmar, where swords clink almost as often as coins. For once there was no fog.

In the Plaza of Dark Delights, which lies seven blocks south of the Marsh Gate and extends from the Fountain of Dark Abundance to the Shrine of the Black Virgin, the shop-lights glinted upward no more brightly than the stars glinted down. For there the vendors of drugs and the peddlers of curiosa and the hawkers of assignations light their stalls and crouching places with foxfire, glowworms, and firepots with tiny single windows, and they conduct their business almost as silently as the stars conduct theirs.

There are plenty of raucous spots a-glare with torches in nocturnal Lankhmar, but by immemorial tradition soft whispers and a pleasant dimness are the

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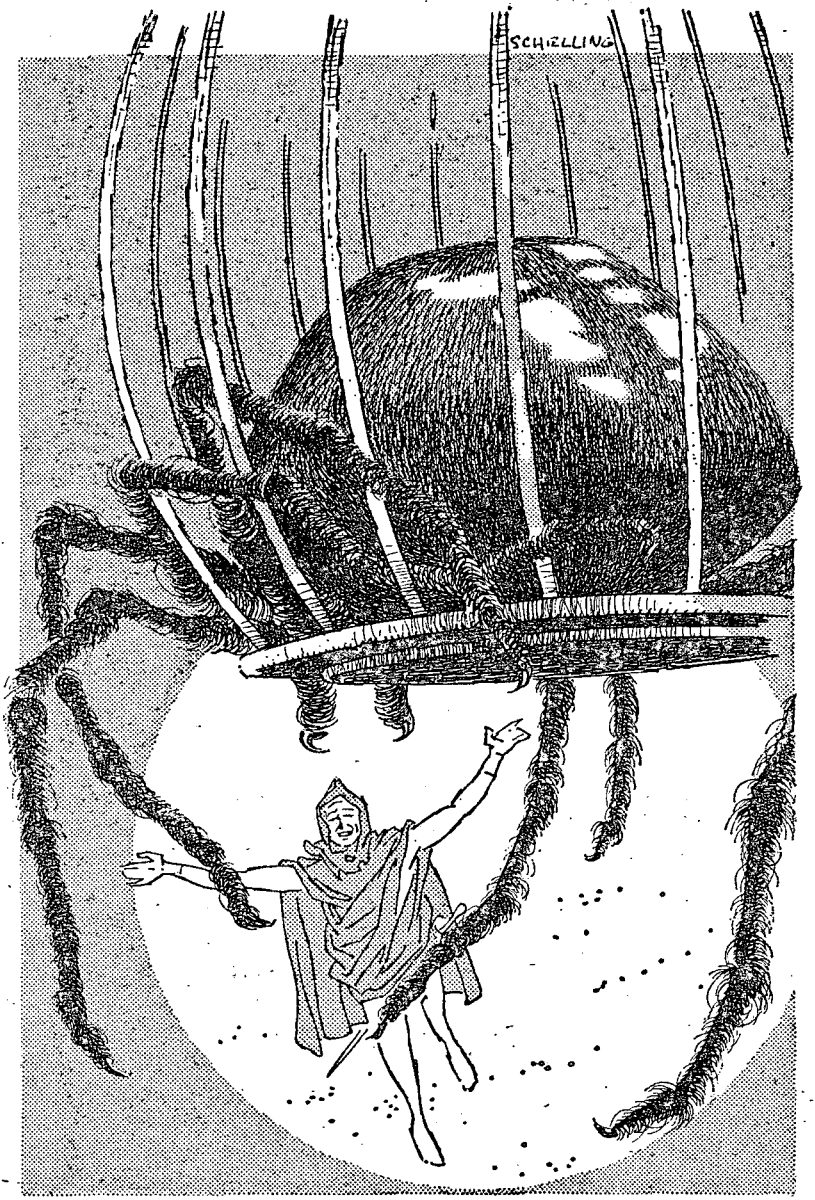

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rule in the Plaza of Dark Delights. Philosophers often go there solely to meditate, students to dream, and fanatic-eyed theologians to spin like spiders abstruse new theories of the Devil and of the other dark forces ruling the universe. And if any of these find a little illicit fun by the way, their theories and dreams and theologies and demonologies are undoubtedly the better for it.

Tonight however, there was a glaring exception to the darkness rule. From a low doorway with a trefoil arch new-struck through an ancient wall, light spilled into the Plaza. Rising above the horizon of the pavement like some monstrous moon a-shine with the ray of a murderous sun, the new doorway dimmed almost to extinction the stars of the other merchants of mystery.

Eerie and unearthly objects for sale spilled out of the doorway a little way with the light, while beside the doorway crouched an avid-faced figure clad in garments never before seen on land or sea . . . in the World of Nehwon. He wore a hat like a small red pail, baggy trousers, and outlandish red boots with upturned toes. His eyes were as predatory as a hawk's, but his smile as cynically and lasciviously cajoling as an ancient satyr's.

Now and again he sprang up and pranced about, sweeping and re-sweeping with a rough long broom the flagstones as if to clean path for the entry of some fantastic emperor, and he often paused in his dance to bow low and loutingly, but always with upglancing eyes, to the crowd gathering in the darkness across from the doorway and to swing his hand from them toward the interior of the new shop in a gesture of invitation at once servile and sinister.

No one of the crowd had yet plucked up courage to step forward into the glare and enter the shop, or even inspect the rarities set out so carelessly yet temptingly before it. But the number of fascinated peerers increased momently. There were mutterings of censure at the dazzling new method of merchandising—the infraction of the Plaza's custom of darkness—but on the whole the complaints were outweighed by the gasps and murmurings of wonder, admiration, and curiosity kindling ever hotter.

THE gray Mouser slipped into the Plaza at the Fountain end as silently as if he had come to slit a throat or spy on the spies of the Overlord. His rat-skin moccasins were soundless. His sword Scapel in its mouse-skin sheath did not swish ever so faintly against either his tunic or cloak,

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both of gray silk curiously coarse of weave. While the glances he shot about him from under his gray silk hood half thrown back were freighted with menace and a freezing sense of superiority.

Inwardly the Mouser was feeling very much like a schoolboy—a schoolboy in dread of rebuke and a crushing assignment of homework. For in the Mouser's pouch of rat-skin was a note scrawled in dark brown squid-ink on silvery fish-skin by Sheelba of the Eyeless Face, inviting the Mouser to be at this spot at this time.

Sheelba was the Mouser's supernatural tutor and—when the whim struck Sheelba—guardian, and it never did to ignore his invitations, for Sheelba had eyes to track down the unsociable though he did not carry them between his cheeks and forehead.

But the tasks Sheelba would set the Mouser at times like these were apt to be peculiarly onerous and even noisome—such as procuring nine white cats with never a black hair among them, or stealing five copies of the same book of magic runes from five widely separated sorcerous libraries or obtaining specimens of the dung of four kings living or dead—so the Mouser had come early, to get the bad news as soon as possible, and he had come alone, for he certainly did not want his comrade Fafhrd to stand snickering by while Sheelba delivered his little wizardly homilies to a dutiful Mouser . . . and perchance thought of extra assignments.

Sheelba's note, invisibly graven somewhere inside the Mouser's skull, read merely, "When the star Akul bedizens the Spire of Rhan, be you by the Fountain of Dark Abundance," and the note was signed only with the little featureless oval which is Sheelba's sigil.

The Mouser glided now through the darkness to the Fountain, which was a squat black pillar from the rough rounded top of which a single black drop welled and dripped every twenty elephant's heartbeats.

The Mouser stood beside the Fountain and, extending a bent hand, measured the altitude of the green star Akul. It had still to drop down the sky seven finger-widths more before it would touch the needle-point of the slim star-silhouetted distant minaret of Rhan.

The Mouser crouched doubled-up by the black pillar and then vaulted lightly atop it to see if that would make any great difference in Akul's altitude. It did not.

He scanned the nearby darkness for motionless figures . . . especially that of one robed and

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cowled like a monk—cowled so deeply that one might wonder how he saw to walk. There were no figures at all.

The Mouser's mood changed. If Sheelba chose not to come courteously beforehand, why he could be boorish too! He strode off to investigate the new bright arch-doored shop, of whose infractious glow he had become inquisitively aware at least a block before he had entered the Plaza of Dark Delights.

FAFHRD the Northerner opened one wine-heavy eye and without moving his head scanned half the small firelit room in which he slept naked. He shut that eye, opened the other, and scanned the other half.

There was no sign of the Mouser anywhere. So far so good! If his luck held, he would be able to get through tonight's embarrassing business without being jeered at by the small gray rogue.

He drew from under his stubbly cheek a square of violet serpent-hide pocked with tiny pores so that when he held it between his eyes and the dancing fire it made stars. Studied for a time, these stars spelled out obscurely the message: "When Rhan-dagger stabs the darkness in Akulheart, seek you the Source of the Black Drops."

Drawn boldly across the prick-holes in an orange-brown like dried blood—in fact spanning the violet square—was a seven-armed swastika, which is one of the sigils of Ningauble of the Seven Eyes.

Fafhrd had no difficulty in interpreting the Source of the Black Drops as the Fountain of Dark Abundance. He had become wearily familiar with such cryptic poetic language during his boyhood as a scholar of the singing skalds.

Ningauble stood to Fafhrd very much as Sheelba stood to the Mouser except that the Seven-Eyed One was a somewhat more pretentious arch-image, whose taste in the thaumaturgical tasks he set Fafhrd ran in larger directions such as the slaying of dragons, the sinking of four-masted magic ships, and the kidnapping of ogre-guarded enchanted queens.

Also, Ningauble was given to quiet realistic boasting, especially about the grandeur of his vast cavern-home, whose stony serpent-twisting back corridors led, he often averred, to all spots in space and time—provided Ningauble instructed one beforehand exactly how to step those rocky crook'd low-ceilinged passageways.

Fafhrd was driven by no great desire to learn Ningauble's formulas and enchantments, as the

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Mouser was driven to learn Sheelba's, but the Septinocular One had enough holds on the Northerner, based on the latter's weaknesses and past misdeeds, so that Fafhrd had always to listen patiently to Ningauble's wizardly admonishments and vaunting sorcerous chit-chat—but *not*, if humanly or inhumanly possible, while the Gray Mouser was present to snigger and grin.

Meanwhile, Fafhrd, standing before the fire, had been whipping, slapping, and belting various garments and weapons and ornaments onto his huge brawny body with its generous stretches of thick short curling red-gold hairs. When he opened the outer door and, also booted and helmeted now, glanced down the darkling alleyway preparatory to leaving and noted only the hunch-backed chestnut vendor asquat by his brazier at the next corner, one would have sworn that when he did stride forth toward the Plaza of Dark Delights it would be with the clankings and thunderous tread of a siege-tower approaching a thick-walled city.

Instead the lynx-eared old chestnut vendor, who was also a spy of the Overlord, had to swallow down his heart when it came sliding crookedly up his throat as Fafhrd rushed past him, tall as a pine tree, swift as the wind, and silent as a ghost.

THE Mouser elbowed aside two gawkers with shrewd taps on the floating rib and strode across the dark flagstones toward the garishly bright shop with its doorway like an up-ended heart. It occured to him they must have had masons working like fiends to have cut and plastered that archway so swiftly. He had been past here this afternoon and noted nothing but blank wall.

The outlandish porter with the red cylinder hat and twisty red shoe-toes came frisking out to the Mouser with his broom and then went curtsying back as he re-swept a path for this first customer with many an obsequious bow and smirk.

But the Mouser's visage was set in an expression of grim and all-skeptical disdain. He paused at the heaping of objects in front of the door and scanned it with disapproval. He drew Scalpel from its thin gray sheath and with the top of the long blade flipped back the cover on the topmost of a pile of musty books. Without going any closer he briefly scanned the first page, shook his head, rapidly turned a half dozen more pages with Scalpel's tip, using the swords as if it were a teacher's wand to point out words here and there—because they were ill-chosen, to judge from his expression—and then abruptly closed the book with another sword-flip.

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Next he used Scalpel's tip to lift a red cloth hanging from a table behind the books and peer under it suspiciously, to rap contemptuously a glass jar with a human head floating in it, to touch disparagingly several other objects and to waggle reprovingly at a foot-chained owl which hooted at him solemnly from its high perch.

He sheathed Scalpel and turned toward the Porter with a sour, lifted-eyebrow look which said—nay, shouted—plainly, "Is *this* all you have to offer? Is this garbage your excuse for defiling the Dark Plaza with glare?"

Actually the Mouser was mightily interested by every least item which he had glimpsed. The book, incidentally, had been in a script which he not only did not understand, but did not even recognize.

Three things were very clear to the Mouser: first, that this stuff offered here for sale did not come from anywhere in the World of Nehwon, no, not even from Nehwon's farthest outback; second, that all this stuff was, in some way which he could not yet define, extremely dangerous; third, that all this stuff was monstrously fascinating and that he, the Mouser, did not intend to stir from this place until he had personally scanned, studied, and if need be tested, every last intriguing item and scrap.

AT the Mouser's sour grimace, the Porter went into a convulsion of wheedling and fawning caperings, seemingly torn between a desire to kiss the Mouser's foot and to point out with flamboyant caressing gestures every object in his shop.

He ended by bowing so low that his chin brushed the pavement, sweeping an ape-long arm toward the interior of the shop, and gibbering in atrocious Lankhmarese, "Every object to pleasure the flesh and senses and imagination of man. Wonders undreamed. Very cheap, very cheap! Yours for a penny! The Bazaar of the Bizarre. Please to inspect, oh king!"

The Mouser yawned a very long yawn with the back of his hand to his mouth, next he looked around him again with the weary patient worldly smile of a duke who knows he must put up with many boredoms to encourage business in his demesne, finally he shrugged faintly and entered the shop.

Behind him the Porter went into a jigging delirium of glee and began to re-sweep the flagstones like a man maddened with delight.

Inside, the first thing the Mouser saw was a stack of slim books bound in gold-lined fine-grained red and violet leather.

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The second was a rack of gleaming lenses and slim brass tubes calling to be peered through.

The third was a slim dark-haired girl smiling at him mysteriously from a gold-barred cage that swung from the ceiling.

Beyond that cage hung others with bars of silver and strange green, ruby, orange, ultramarine, and purple metals.

Fafhrd saw the Mouser vanish into the shop just as his left hand touched the rough chill pate of the Fountain of Dark Abundance and as Akul poised precisely on Rhan-top as if it were that needle-spire's green-lensed pinnacle-lantern.

He might have followed the Mouser, he might have done no such thing, he certainly would have pondered the briefly glimpsed event, but just then there came from behind him a long low "Hssssst!"

Fafhrd turned like a giant dancer and his longsword Graywand came out of its sheath swiftly and rather more silently than a snake emerges from its hole.

Ten arm-lengths behind him, in the mouth of an alleyway darker than the Dark Plaza would have been without its new commercial moon, Fafhrd dimly made out two robed and deeply cowled figures poised side by side.

One cowl held darkness absolute. Even the face of a Negro of Klesh might have been expected to shoot ghostly bronzy gleams. But here there were none.

In the other cowl there nested seven very faint pale greenish glows. They moved about restlessly, sometimes circling each other, swinging mazily. Sometimes one of the seven horizontally oval gleams would grow a little brighter, seemingly as it moved forward toward the mouth of the cowl—or a little darker, as it drew back.

Fafhrd sheathed Graywand and advanced toward the figures. Still facing him, they retreated slowly and silently down the alley.

Fafhrd followed as they receded. He felt a stirring of interest . . . and of other feelings. To meet his own supernatural mentor alone might be only a bore and a mild nervous strain; but it would be hard for anyone entirely to repress a shiver of awe at encountering at one and the same time both Ningauble of the Seven Eyes and Sheelba of the Eyeless Face.

Moreover, that those two bitter wizardly rivals should have joined forces, that they should apparently be operating together in amity . . . Something of great note must be a-foot! There was no doubting that.

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THE Mouser meantime was experiencing the snuggest, most mind-teasing, most exotic enjoyments imaginable. The sleekly leather-bound gold-stamped books turned out to contain scripts stranger far than that in the book whose pages he had flipped outside—scripts that looked like skeletal beasts, cloud swirls, and twisty-branched bushes and trees—but for a wonder he could read them all without the least difficulty.

The books dealt in the fullest detail with such matters as the private life of devils, the secret histories of murderous cults, and —these were illustrated—the proper dueling techniques to employ against sword-armed demons and the erotic tricks of lamias, succubi, bacchantes, and hamadryads.

The lenses and brass tubes, some of the latter of which were as fantastically crooked as if they were periscopes for seeing over the walls and through the barred windows of other universes, showed at first only delightful jeweled patterns, but after a bit the Mouser was able to see through them all into sorts of interesting places: the treasure-rooms of dead kings, the bed-chambers of living queens, council-crypts of rebel angels, and the closets in which the gods hid plans for worlds too frighteningly fantastic to risk creating.

As for the quaintly clad slim girls in their playfully widely-barred cages, well, they were pleasant pillows on which to rest eyes momentarily fatigued by book-scanning and tube-peering.

Ever and anon one of the girls would whistle softly at the Mouser and then point cajolingly or imploringly or with langorous hintings at a jeweled crank set in the wall whereby her cage, suspended on a gleaming chain running through gleaming pulleys, could be lowered to the floor.

At these invitations the Mouser would smile with a bland amorousness and nod and softly wave a hand from the finger-hinge as if to whisper, "Later . . . later. Be patient."

After all, girls had a way of blotting out all lesser, but not thereby despicable, delights. Girls were for dessert.

NINGAUBLE and Sheelba receded down the dark alleyway with Fafhrd following them until the latter lost patience and, somewhat conquering his unwilling awe, called out nervously, "Well, are you going to keep on fleeing me backwards until we all pitch into the Great Salt Marsh? What do you want of me? What's it all about?"

But the two cowled figures had already stopped, as he could perceive by the starlight and the glow of a few high windows, and

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now it seemed to Fafhrd that they had stopped a moment before he had called out. A typical sorcerors' trick for making one feel awkward! He gnawed his lip in the darkness. It was ever thus!

"Oh My Gentle Son . . ." Ningauble began in his most sugary-priestly tones, the dim puffs of his seven eyes now hanging in his cowl as steadily and glowing as mildly as the Pleiades seen late on a summer night through a greenish mist rising from a lake freighted with blue vitriol and corrosive gas of salt.

"I asked what it's all about!" Fafhrd interrupted harshly. Already convicted of impatience, he might as well go the whole hog.

"Let me put it as a hypothetical case," Ningauble replied imperturbably. "Let us suppose, My Gentle Son, that there is a man in a universe and that a most evil force comes to this universe from another universe, or perhaps from a congeries of universes, and that this man is a brave man who wants to defend his universe and who counts his life as a trifle and that moreover he has to counsel him a very wise and prudent and public-spirited uncle who knows all about these matters which I have been hypothecating—"

"The Devourers menace Lankhmar!" Sheelba rapped out in a voice as harsh as a tree cracking and so suddenly that Fafhrd almost started—and for all we know, Ningauble too.

Fafhrd waited a moment to avoid giving false impressions and then switched his gaze to Sheelba. His eyes had been growing accustmed to the darkness and he saw much more now than he had seen at the alley's mouth, yet he still saw not one jot more than absolute blackness inside Sheelba's cowl.

"Who are the Devourers?" he asked.

It was Ningauble, however, who replied, "The Devourers are the most accomplished merchants in all the many universes —so accomplished, indeed, that they sell only trash. There is a deep necessity in this, for the Devourers must occupy all their cunning in perfecting their methods of selling and so have not an instant to spare in considering the worth of what they sell—indeed, they dare not concern themselves with such matters for a moment, for fear of losing their golden touch—and yet such are their skills that their wares are utterly irresistible, indeed the finest wares in all the many universes—if you follow me?"

Fafhrd looked hopefully toward Sheelba, but since the latter did not this time interrupt

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with some pithy summation, he nodded to Ningauble.

Ningauble continued, his seven eyes beginning to weave a bit, judging from the movements of the seven green glows, "As you might readily deduce, the Devourers possess all the mightiest magics garnered from the many universes, whilst their assault groups are led by the most aggressive wizards imaginable, supremely skilled in all methods of battling, whether it be with the wits, or the feelings, or with the beweaponed body.

"The method of the Devourers is to set up shop in a new world and first entice the bravest and the most adventuresome and the supplest-minded of its people—who have so much imagination that with just a touch of suggestion they themselves do most of the work of selling themselves.

"When these are safely ensnared, the Devourers proceed to deal with the remainder of the population: meaning simply that they sell and sell and sell!—sell trash and take good money and even finer things in exchange."

Ningauble sighed windily and a shade piously. "All this is very bad, My Gentle Son," he continued, his eye-glows weaving hypnotically in his cowl, "but natural enough in universes administered by such gods as we have—natural enough and perhaps endurable. However—" (He paused) "—there is worse to come! The Devourers want not only the patronage of all beings in all universes, but—doubtless because they are afraid someone will some day raise the ever-unpleasant question of the true worth of things—they want all their customers reduced to a state of slavish and submissive suggestibility, so that they are fit for nothing whatever but to gawk at and buy the trash the Devourers offer for sale. This means of course that eventually the Devourers' customers will have nothing wherewith to pay the Devourers for their trash, but the Devourers do not seem to be concerned with this eventuality. Perhaps they feel that there is always a new universe to exploit. And perhaps there is!"

MONSTROUS!" Fafhrd commented. "But what do the Devourers gain from all these furious commercial sorties, all this mad merchandising? What do they really want?"

Ningauble replied, "The Devourers want only to amass cash and to raise little ones like themselves to amass more cash and they want to compete with each other at cash-amassing (Is that coincidentally a city, do you think, Fafhrd? Cashamash?) and the Devourers want to brood about their great service to the many universes—it is their

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claim that servile customers make the most obedient subjects for the gods—and to complain about how the work of amassing cash tortures their minds and upsets their digestions. Beyond this, each of the Devourers also secretly collects and hides away forever, to delight no eyes but his own, all the finest objects and thoughts created by true men and women (and true wizards and true demons) and bought by the Devourers at bankruptcy prices and paid for with trash or—this is their ultimate preference—with nothing at all."

"Monstrous indeed!" Fafhrd repeated. "Merchants are ever an evil mystery and these sound the worst. But what has all this to do with me?"

"Oh My Gentle Son," Ningauble responded, the piety in his voice now tinged with a certain clement disappointment, "you force me once again to resort to hypothecating. Let us return to the supposition of this brave man whose whole universe is direly menaced and who counts his life a trifle and to the related supposition of this brave man's wise uncle, whose advice the brave man invariably follows—"

"The Devourers have set up shop in the Plaza of Dark Delights!" Sheelba interjected so abruptly and in such iron-harsh syllables that this time Fafhrd actually did start. "You must obliterate this outpost tonight!"

Fafhrd considered that for a bit, then said, in a tentative sort of voice, "You will both accompany me, I presume, to aid me with your wizardly sendings and castings in what I can see must be a most perilous operation, to serve me as a sort of sorcerous artillery and archery corps while I play assault battalion—"

"Oh My Gentle Son . . ." Ningauble interrupted in tones of deepest disappointment, shaking his head so that his eyeglows jogged in his cowl.

"You must do it alone!" Sheelba rasped.

"Without any help at all?" Fafhrd demanded. "No! Get someone else. Get this doltish brave man who always follows his scheming uncle's advice as slavishly as you tell me the Devourers' customers respond to their merchandising. Get *him!* But as for me—No, I say!"

"Then leave us, coward!" Sheelba decreed dourly, but Ningauble only sighed and said quite apologetically, "It was intended that you have a comrade in this quest, a fellow soldier against noisome evil—to wit, the Gray Mouser. But unfortunately he came early to his appointment with my colleague here and was enticed into the shop of the Devourers and is doubtless now deep in their snares, if not al-

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ready extinct. So you can see that we do take thought for your welfare and have no wish to overburden you with solo quests. However, My Gentle Son, if it still be your firm resolve—"

FAFHRD let out a sigh more profound than Ningauble's. "Very well," he said in gruff tones admitting defeat, "I'll do it for you. Someone will have to pull that poor little gray fool out of the pretty-pretty fire—or the twinkly-twinkly water!—that tempted him. But how do I go about it?" He shook a big finger at Ningauble. "And no more Gentle-Sonning!"

Ningauble paused. Then he said only, "Use your own judgement."

Sheelba said, "Beware the Black Wall!"

Ningauble said to Fafhrd, "Hold, I have a gift for you" and held out to him a ragged ribbon a yard long, pinched between the cloth of the wizard's long sleeve so that it was impossible to see the manner of hand that pinched. Fafhrd took the tatter with a snort, crumpled it into a ball, and thrust it into his pouch.

"Have a greater care with it," Ningauble warned. "It is the Cloak of Invisibility, somewhat worn by many magic usings. Do not put it on until you near the Bazaar of the Devourers. It has two minor weaknesses: it will not make you altogether invisible to a master sorcerer if he senses your presence and takes certain steps. Also, see to it that you do not bleed during this exploit, for the cloak will not hide blood."

"I've a gift too!" Sheelba said, drawing from out of his black cowl-hole—with sleeve-masked hand, as Ningauble had done—something that shimmered faintly in the dark like . . .

Like a spiderweb.

Sheelba shook it, as if to dislodge a spider, or perhaps two.

"The Blindfold of True Seeing," he said as he reached it toward Fafhrd. "It shows all things as they really are! Do not lay it across your eyes until you enter the Bazaar. On no account, as you value your life or your sanity, wear it now!"

Fafhrd took it from him most gingerly, the flesh of his fingers crawling. He was inclined to obey the taciturn wizard's instructions. At this moment he truly did not much care to see the true visage of Sheelba of the Eyeless Face.

THE gray Mouser was reading the most interesting book of them all, a great compendium of secret knowledge written in a script of astrologic and geomantic signs, the meanings of which fairly leaped off the page into his mind.

To rest his eyes from that—or

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rather to keep from gobbling the book too fast—he peered through a nine-elbowed brass tube at a scene that could only be the blue heaven-pinnacle of the universe where angels flew shimmeringly like dragonflies and where a few choice heroes rested from their great mountain-climb and spied down critically on the antlike labors of the gods many levels below.

To rest his eye from *that*, he looked up between the scarlet (bloodmetal?) bars of the inmost cage at the most winsome slim fair jet-eyed girl of them all. She knelt, sitting on her heels, with her upper body leaned back a little. She wore a red velvet tunic and had a mop of golden hair so thick and pliant that she could sweep it in a neat curtain over her upper face, down almost to her pouting lips. With the slim fingers of one hand she would slightly part these silky golden drapes to peer at the Mouser playfully, while with those of the other she rattled golden castanets in a most langorously slow rhythm, though with occasional swift staccato bursts.

The Mouser was considering whether it might not be as well to try a turn or two on the ruby-crusted golden crank next his elbow, when he spied for the first time the glimmering wall at the back of the shop. What could its material be?—he asked himself. Tiny diamonds countless as the sand set in smoky glass? Black opal? Black pearl? Black moonshine?

Whatever it was, it was wholly fascinating, for the Mouser quickly set down his book, using the nine-crooked spy-tube to mark his place—a most engrossing pair of pages on dueling where were revealed the Universal Parry and its five false variants and also the three true forms of the Secret Thrust—and with only a finger-wave to the ensorceling blonde in red velvet he walked quickly toward the back of the shop.

As he approached the Black Wall he thought for an instant that he glimpsed a silver wraith, or perhaps a silver skeleton, walking toward him out of it, but then he saw that it was only his own darkly handsome reflection, pleasantly flattered by the lustrous material. What had momentarily suggested silver ribs was the reflection of the silver lacings on his tunic.

He smirked at his image and reached out a finger to touch *its* lustrous finger when—Lo, a wonder!—his hand went into the wall with never a sensation at all save a faint tingling coolth promising comfort like the sheets of a fresh-made bed.

HE looked at his hand inside the wall and—Lo, another

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wonder!—it was all a beautiful silver faintly patterned with tiny scales. And though his own hand indubitably, as he could tell by clenching it, it was scarless now and a mite slimmer and longer fingered—altogether a more handsome hand than it had been a moment ago.

He wriggled his fingers and it was like watching small silver fish dart about—fingerlings!

What a droll conceit, he thought, to have a dark fishpond or rather swimming pool set on its side indoors, so that one could walk into the gracious erect fluid quietly and gracefully, instead of all the noisy, bouncingly athletic business of diving!

And how charming that the pool should be filled not with wet soppy cold water, but with a sort of moondark essence of sleep!—an essence with beautifying cosmetic properties too!—a sort of mudbath without the mud. The Mouser decided he must have a swim in this wonder pool at once, but just then his gaze lit on a long high black couch toward the other end of the dark liquid wall, and beyond the couch a small high table set with viands and a crystal pitcher and goblet.

He walked along the wall to inspect these, his handsome reflection taking step for step with him.

He trailed his hand in the wall for a space and then withdrew it, the scales instantly vanishing and the familiar old scars returning.

The couch turned out to be a narrow high-sided black coffin lined with quilted black satin and piled at one end with little black satin pillows. It looked most invitingly comfortable and restful—not quite as inviting as the Black Wall, but very attractive just the same: there was even a rack of tiny black books nested in the black satin for the occupant's diversion and also a black candle, unlit.

The collation on the little ebony table beyond the coffin consisted entirely of black foods. By sight and then by nibbling and sipping the Mouser discovered their nature: thin slices of a very dark rye bread crusted with poppy seeds and dripped with black butter; slivers of charcoal-seared steak; similarly broiled tiny thin slices of calf's liver sprinkled with dark spices and liberally pricked with capers; the darkest grape jellies; truffles cut paper thin and mushrooms fried black; pickled chestnuts; and of course ripe olives and black fish eggs—caviar. The black drink, which foamed when he poured it, turned out to be stout laced with the bubbly wine of Ilthmar.

He decided to refresh the inner Mouser—the Mouser who

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lived a sort of blind soft greedy undulating surface-life between his lips and his belly—before taking a dip in the Black Wall.

FAFHRD re-entered the Plaza of Dark Delights walking warily and with the long tatter that was the Cloak of Invisibility trailing from between left forefinger and thumb and with the glimmering cobweb that was the Blindfold of True Seeing pinched even more delicately by its edge between the same digits of his right hand. He was not yet altogether certain that the trailing gossamer hexagon was completely free of spiders.

Across the Plaza he spotted the bright-mouthed shop—the shop he had been told was an outpost of the deadly Devourers—through a ragged gather of folk moving about restlessly and commenting and speculating to one another in harsh excited undertones.

The only feature of the shop Fafhrd could make out at all clearly at this distance was the red-capped red-footed baggy-trousered porter, not capering now but leaning on his long broom beside the trefoil-arched doorway.

With a looping swing of his left arm Fafhrd hung the Cloak of Invisibility around his neck. The ragged ribband hung to either side down his chest in its wolfskin jerkin only halfway to his wide belt which supported longsword and short-ax. It did not vanish his body to the slightest degree that he could see and he doubted it worked at all—like many another thaumaturge, Ningauble never hesitated to give one useless charms, not for any treacherous reason, necessarily, but simply to improve ones morale. Fafhrd strode boldly toward the shop.

The Northerner was a tall broad-shouldered formidable-looking man—doubly formidable by his barbaric dress and weaponing in supercivilized Lankhmar—and so he took it for granted that the ordinary run of city folk stepped out of his way; indeed it had never occurred to him that they should not.

He got a shock. All the clerks, seedy bravos, scullery folk, students, slaves, second-rate merchants and second-class courtesans who would automatically have moved aside for him (though the last with a saucy swing of the hips) now came straight at him, so that he had to dodge and twist and stop and even sometimes dart back to avoid being toe-tramped and bumped. Indeed one fat pushy proud-stomached fellow almost carried away his cobweb, which he could see now by the light of the shop was free of spiders—or if there were any spiders still

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on it, they must be very small.

He had so much to do dodging Fafhrd-blind Lankhmarians that he could not spare one more glance for the shop until he was almost at the door. And then before he took his first close look, he found that he was tilting his head so that his left ear touched the shoulder below it and that he was laying Sheelba's spiderweb across his eyes.

The touch of it was simply like the touch of any cobweb when one runs face into it walking between close-set bushes at dawn. Everything shimmered a bit as if seen through a fine crystal grating. Then the least shimmering vanished, and with it the delicate clinging sensation, and Fafhrd's vision returned to normal—as far as he could tell.

IT turned out that the doorway to the Devourers' shop was piled with garbage—garbage of a particularly offensive sort: old bones, dead fish, butcher's offal, moldering gracecloths folded in uneven squares like badly bound uncut books, broken glass and potsherds, splintered boxes, large stinking dead leaves orange-spotted with blight, bloody rags, tattered discarded loincloths, large worms nosing about, centipedes a-scuttle, cockroaches a-stagger, maggots a-crawl—and less agreeable things.

Atop all perched a vulture which had lost most of its feathers and seemed to have expired of some avian eczema. At least Fafhrd took it for dead, but then it opened one white-filmed eye.

The only conceivably salable object outside the shop—but it was a most notable exception—was the tall black iron statue, somewhat larger than life size, of a lean swordsman of dire yet melancholy visage. Standing on its square pedestal beside the door, the statue leaned forward just a little on its long two-handed sword and regarded the Plaza dolefully.

The statue almost teased awake a recollection in Fafhrd's mind—a recent recollection, he fancied—but then there was a blank in his thoughts and he instantly dropped the puzzle. On raids like this one, relentlessly swift action was paramount. He loosened his ax in its loop, noiselessly whipped out Graywand and shrinking away from the piled and crawling garbage just a little, entered the Bazaar of the Bizarre.

* * *

The Mouser, pleasantly replete with tasty black food and heady black drink, drifted to the Black Wall and thrust in his right arm to the shoulder. He waved it about, luxuriating in the softly flowing coolth and balm—and admiring its fine sil-

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ver scales and more than human handsomeness. He did the same with his right leg, swinging it like a dancer exercising at the bar. Then he took a gently deep breath and drifted farther in.

FAFHRD on entering the Bazaar saw the same piles of gloriously bound books and racks of gleaming brass spy-tubes and crystal lenses as had the Mouser—a circumstance which seemed to overset Ningauble's theory that the Devourers sold only trash.

He also saw the eight beautiful cages of jewel-gleaming metals and the gleaming chains that hung them from the ceiling and went to the jeweled wall cranks.

Each cage held a gleaming, gloriously hued, black- or light-haired spider big as a rather small person and occasionally waving a long jointed claw-handed leg, or softly opening a little and then closing a pair of fanged down-swinging mandibles, while staring steadily at Fafhrd with eight watchful eyes set in two jewellike rows of four.

Set a spider to catch a spider, Fafhrd thought, thinking of his cobweb, and then wondered what the thought meant.

He quickly switched to more practical questions then, but he had barely asked himself whether before proceeding further he should kill the very expensive-looking spiders, fit to be the coursing beasts of some jungle empress—another count against Ning's trash-theory!—when he heard a faint splashing from the back of the shop. It reminded him of the Mouser taking a bath—the Mouser loved baths, slow luxurious ones in hot soapy scented oil-dripped water, the small gray sybarite!—and so Fafhrd hurried off in that direction with many a swift upward overshoulder glance.

He was detouring the last cage, a scarlet-metalled one holding the handsomest spider yet, when he noted a book set down with a crooked spy-tube in it—exactly as the Mouser would keep his place in a book by closing it on a dagger.

Fafhrd paused to open the book. Its lustrous white pages were blank. He put his impalpably cobwebbed eye to the spy-tube. He glimpsed a scene that could only be the smoky red hell-nadir of the universe, where dark devils scuttled about like centipedes and where chained folk gazing yearningly upward at the damned writhed in the grip of black serpents whose eyes shone and whose fangs dripped and whose nostrils breathed fire.

As he dropped tube and book, he heard the faint sonorous quick dull report of bubbles being expelled from a fluid at its

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surface. Staring instantly toward the dim back of the shop, he saw at last the pearl-shimmering Black Wall and a silver skeleton eyed with great diamonds receding into it. However, this costly bone-man—once more Ning's trash-theory disproven!—still had one arm sticking part way out of the wall and this arm was not bone, whether silver, white, brownish or pink, but live-looking flesh covered with proper skin.

AS the arm sank into the wall, Fafhrd sprang forward as fast as he ever had in his life and grabbed the hand just before it vanished. He knew then he had hold of his friend, for he would recognize anywhere the Mouser's grip, no matter how enfeebled. He tugged, but it was as if the Mouser were mired in black quicksand. He laid Graywand down and grasped the Mouser by the wrist too and braced his feet against the rough black flags and gave a tremendous heave.

The silver skeleton came out of the wall with a black splash, metamorphosing as it did into a vacant-eyed Gray Mouser who without a look at his friend and rescuer went staggering off in a curve and pitched head over heels into the black coffin.

But before Fafhrd could hoist his comrade from this new gloomy predicament, there was a swift clash of footsteps and there came racing into the shop, somewhat to Fafhrd's surprise, the tall black iron statue. It had forgotten or simply stepped off its pedestal, but it had remembered its two-handed sword, which it brandished about most fiercely while shooting searching black glances like iron darts at every shadow and corner and nook.

The black gaze passed Fafhrd without pausing, but halted at Graywand lying on the floor. At the sight of that longsword the statue started visibly, snarled its iron lips, its black eyes narrowed, it shot glances more ironly stabbing than before, and it began to move about the shop in sudden zigzag rushes, sweeping its darkly flashing sword in low scythe-strokes.

At that moment the Mouser peeped moon-eyed over the edge of the coffin, lifted a limp hand and waved it at the statue, and in a soft sly foolish voice cried, "Yoo-hoo!"

The statue paused in its searchings and scythings to glare at the Mouser in mixed contempt and puzzlement.

The Mouser rose to his feet in the black coffin, swaying drunkenly, and dug in his pouch.

"Ho, slave!" he cried to the statue with maudlin gayety, "your wares are passing passable. I'll take the girl in red vel-

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vet." He pulled a coin from his pouch, goggled at it closely, then pitched it at the statue. "That's one penny. And the nine-crook'd spy-tube. That's another penny." He pitched it. "And *Gron's Grand Compendium of Exotic Lore*—another penny for you! Yes, and here's one more for supper—very tasty, 'twas. Oh and I almost forgot—here's for tonight's lodging!" He pitched a fifth large copper coin at the demonic black statue and, smiling blissfully, flopped back out of sight. The black quilted satin could be heard to sigh as he sank in it.

Four-fifths of the way through the Mouser's penny-pitching Fafhrd decided it was useless to try to unriddle his comrade's nonsensical behavior and that it would be far more to the point to make use of this diversion to snatch up Graywand. He did so on the instant, but by that time the black statue was fully alert again, if it had ever been otherwise. Its gaze switched to Graywand the instant Fafhrd touched the longsword and it stamped its foot, which rang against the stone, and cried a harsh metallic "Ha!"

APPARENTLY the sword became invisible as Fafhrd grasped it, for the black statue did not follow him with its iron eyes as he shifted position across the room. Instead it swiftly laid down its own mighty blade and caught up a long narrow silver trumpet and set it to its lips.

Fafhrd thought it wise to attack before the statue summoned reinforcements. He rushed straight at the thing, swinging back Graywand for a great stroke at the neck—and steeling himself for an arm-numbing impact.

The statue blew and instead of the alarm blare Fafhrd had expected, there silently puffed out straight at him a great cloud of white powder that momentarily blotted out everything, as if it were the thickest of fogs from Hlal-river.

Fafhrd retreated, choking and coughing. The demon-blown fog cleared quickly, the white powder falling to the stony floor with unnatural swiftness, and he could see again to attack, but now the statue apparently could see him too, for it squinted straight at him and cried its metallic "Ha!" again and whirled its sword around its iron head preparatory to the charge—rather as if winding itself up.

Fafhrd saw that his own hands and arms were thickly filmed with the white powder, which apparently clung to him everywhere except his eyes, doubtless protected by Sheelba's cobweb.

The iron statue came thrusting and slashing in, Fafhrd took the great sword on his, chopped back,

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and was parried in return. And now the combat assumed the noisy deadly aspects of a conventional longsword duel, except that Graywand was notched whenever it caught the chief force of a stroke, while the statue's somewhat longer weapon remained unmarked. Also whenever Fafhrd got through the other's guard with a thrust—it was almost impossible to reach him with a slash—it turned out that the other had slipped his lean body or head aside with unbelievably swift and infallible anticipations.

It seemed to Fafhrd—at least at the time—the most fell, frustrating, and certainly the most wearisome combat in which he had ever engaged, so he suffered some feelings of hurt and irritation when the Mouser reeled up in his coffin again and leaned an elbow on the black-satin-quilted side and rested chin on fist and grinned hugely at the battlers and from time to time laughed wildly and shouted such enraging nonsense as, "Use Secret Thrust Two-and-a-Half, Fafhrd—it's all in the book!" or "Jump in the oven!—there'd be a master stroke of strategy!" or—this to the statue—"Remember to sweep under his feet, you rogue!"

Backing away from one of Fafhrd's sudden attacks, the statue bumped the table holding the remains of the Mouser's repast—evidently its anticipatory abilities did not extend to its rear—and scraps of black food and white potsherds and jags of crystal scattered across the floor.

The Mouser leaned out of his coffin and waved a finger waggishly. "You'll have to sweep that up!" he cried and went off into a gale of laughter.

Backing away again, the statue bumped the black coffin. The Mouser only clapped the demonic figure comradely on the shoulder and called, "Set to it again, clown! Brush him down! Dust him off!"

But the worst was perhaps when, during a brief pause while the combatants gasped and eyed each other dizzily, the Mouser waved coyly to the nearest giant spider and called his inane "Yoo-hoo!" again, following it with, "I'll see you, dear, after the circus."

Fafhrd, parrying with weary desperation a fifteenth or a fiftieth cut at his head, thought bitterly, *This comes of trying to rescue small heartless madmen who would howl at their grandmothers hugged by bears. Sheelba's cobweb has shown me the Gray One in his true idiot nature.*

THE Mouser had first been furious when the sword-skirling clashed him awake from his black satin dreams, but as soon as he saw what was going on he be-

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came enchanted at the wildly comic scene.

For, lacking Sheelba's cobweb, what the Mouser saw was only the zany red-capped porter prancing about in his ridiculous tip-curled red shoes and aiming with his broom great strokes at Fafhrd, who looked exactly as if he had climbed a moment ago out of a barrel of meal. The only part of the Northerner not whitely dusted was a shadowy dark mask-like stretch across his eyes.

What made the whole thing fantastically droll was that miller-white Fafhrd was going through all the motions—and emotions!—of a genuine combat with excruciating precision, parrying the broom as if it were some great jolting scimitar or two-handed broadsword even. The broom would go sweeping up and Fafhrd would gawk at it, giving a marvellous interpretation of apprehensive goggling despite his strangely shadowed eyes. Then the broom would come sweeping down and Fafhrd would brace himself and seem to catch it on his sword only with the most prodigious effort—and then pretend to be jolted back by it!

The Mouser had never suspected Fafhrd had such a perfected theatric talent, even if it were acting of a rather mechanical sort, lacking the broad sweeps of true dramatic genius, and he whooped with laughter.

Then the broom brushed Fafhrd's shoulder and blood sprang out.

FAFHRD, wounded at last and thereby knowing himself unlikely to outendure the black statue—although the latter's iron chest was working now like a bellows—decided on swifter measures. He loosened his hand-ax again in its loop and at the next pause in the fight, both battlers having outguessed each other by retreating simultaneously, whipped it up and hurled it at his adversary's face.

Instead of seeking to dodge or ward off the missile, the black statue lowered its sword and merely wove its head in a tiny circle.

The ax closely circled the lean black head, like a silver wood-tailed comet whipping around a black sun, and came back straight at Fafhrd like a boomerang—and rather more swiftly than Fafhrd had sent it.

But time slowed for Fafhrd then and he half ducked and caught it left-handed as it went whizzing past his cheek.

His thoughts too went for a moment fast as his actions. He thought of how his adversary, able to dodge every frontal attack, had not avoided the table or the coffin behind him. He thought of how the Mouser had not laughed now for a dozen clashes

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and he looked at him and saw him, though still dazed-seeming, strangely pale and sober-faced, appearing to stare with horror at the blood running down Fafhrd's arm.

So crying as heartily and merrily as he could, "Amuse yourself! Join in the fun, clown!—here's your slap-stick," Fafhrd tossed the ax toward the Mouser.

Without waiting to see the result of that toss—perhaps not daring to—he summoned up his last reserves of speed and rushed at the black statue in a circling advance that drove it back toward the coffin.

Without shifting his stupid horrified gaze, the Mouser stuck out a hand at the last possible moment and caught the ax by the handle as it spun lazily down.

As the black statue retreated near the coffin and poised for what promised to be a stupendous counterattack, the Mouser leaned out and, now grinning foolishly again, sharply rapped its black pate with the ax.

The iron head split like a coconut, but did not come apart. Fafhrd's hand-ax, wedged in it deeply, seemed to turn all at once to iron like the statue and its black haft was wrenched out of the Mouser's hand as the statue stiffened up straight and tall.

The Mouser stared at the split head woefully, like a child who hadn't known knives cut.

The statue brought its great sword flat against its chest, like a staff on which it might lean but did not, and it fell rigidly forward and hit the floor with a ponderous clank.

AT that stony-metallic thundering, white wildfire ran across the Black Wall, lightening the whole shop like a distant levin-bolt, and the iron-basalt thundering echoed from deep within it.

Fafhrd sheathed Graywand, dragged the Mouser out of the black coffin—the fight hadn't left him the strength to lift even his small friend—and shouted in his ear, "Come on! Run!"

The Mouser ran for the Black Wall.

Fafhrd snagged his wrist as he went by and plunged toward the arched door, dragging the Mouser after him.

The thunder faded out and there came a low whistle, cajolingly sweet.

Wildfire raced again across the Black Wall behind them—much more brightly this time, as if a lightning storm were racing toward them.

The white glare striking ahead imprinted one vision indelibly on Fafhrd's brain: the giant spider in the inmost cage pressed against the bloodred bars to gaze down at them. It had pale legs and a velvet red body and a mask

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of sleek thick golden hair from which eight jet eyes peered, while its fanged jaws hanging down in the manner of the wide blades of a pair of golden scissors rattled together in a wild staccato rhythm like castanets.

That moment the cajoling whistle was repeated. It too seemed to be coming from the red and golden spider.

But strangest of all to Fafhrd was to hear the Mouser, dragged unwillingly along behind him, cry out in answer to the whistling, "Yes, darling, I'm coming. Let me go, Fafhrd! Let me climb to her! Just one kiss! Sweetheart!"

"Stop it, Mouser," Fafhrd growled, his flesh crawling in mid-plunge. "It's a giant spider!"

"Wipe the cobwebs out of your eyes, Fafhrd," the Mouser retorted pleadingly and most unwittingly to the point. "It's a gorgeous girl! I'll never see her tickelsome like—and I've paid for her! *Sweetheart!*"

Then the booming thunder drowned his voice and any more whistling there might have been, and the wildfire came again, brighter than day, and another great thunderclap right on its heels, and the floor shuddered and the whole shop shook, and Fafhrd dragged the Mouser through the trefoil-arched doorway, and there was another great flash and clap.

The flash showed a semicircle of Lankhmarians peering ashen-faced overshoulder as they retreated across the Plaza of Dark Delights from the remarkable indoor thunderstorm that threatened to come out after them.

Fafhrd spun around. The archway had turned to blank wall.

The Bazaar of the Bizarre was gone from the World of Nehwon.

The Mouser, sitting on the dank flags where Fafhrd had dragged him, babbled wailfully, "The secrets of time and space! The lore of the gods! The mysteries of Hell! Black nirvana! Red and gold Heaven! Five pennies gone forever!"

Fafhrd set his teeth. A mighty resolve, rising from his many recent angers and bewilderments, crystallized in him.

Thus far he had used Sheelba's cobweb—and Ningauble's tatter too—only to serve others. Now he would use them for himself! He would peer at the Mouser more closely and at every person he knew. He would study even his own reflection! But most of all, he would stare Sheelba and Ning to their wizardly cores!

There came from overhead a low "Hssst!"

As he glanced up he felt something snatched from around his neck and, with the faintest tingling sensation, from off his eyes.

(*Continued on page 83*)

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The Red Tape Yonder

By VANCE SIMONDS

Bascomb had been a petty bureaucrat. He had to die to learn just how efficient a really organized bureaucracy can be!

J. FROMSHIRE BASCOMB gradually opened his eyes. Rude golden sunlight struck them, and he quickly closed them again; but not before he had caught a glimpse of his surroundings.

He was lying in a bed. Underneath him was a very hard mattress and a stiff sheet. Over him was another sheet, just as stiff, and a thin yellow blanket. Beside his bed was a small table on which a vase of roses stood. The room was barely furnished, white, and immaculately clean.

The conclusion was inescapable: he was in a hospital.

But why? And how?

He carefully recalled the morning. He had arrived bright and early at eleven at the offices of the Procedural Obstacles Authority, the Federal agency which he directed. Late fall weather had been upon Washington, and the brisk air had braced him considerably, in the walk from his limousine up the steps of the agency building. He had been in fine humor as he strode to his suite of offices, greeting those of his staff not out having coffee. There had been all of five clerks at work inventing new regulations and drawing up forms; and the sight had cheered him.

Then something had happened, something to do with Republicans and reducing the staff. Some nasty little man had come in mouthing phrases about slashing expenditures. It had been enough to enrage any right-minded administrator.

Not heeding his doctor's warning about his heart, Bascomb had flown into a fury, to show the fellow exactly where he stood. Got to make these new brooms understand that of mandates of the electorate and need for economy was all hogwash.

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Obviously he had overdone it, and had suffered an attack. Well, he was happy to sacrifice himself for the public weal.

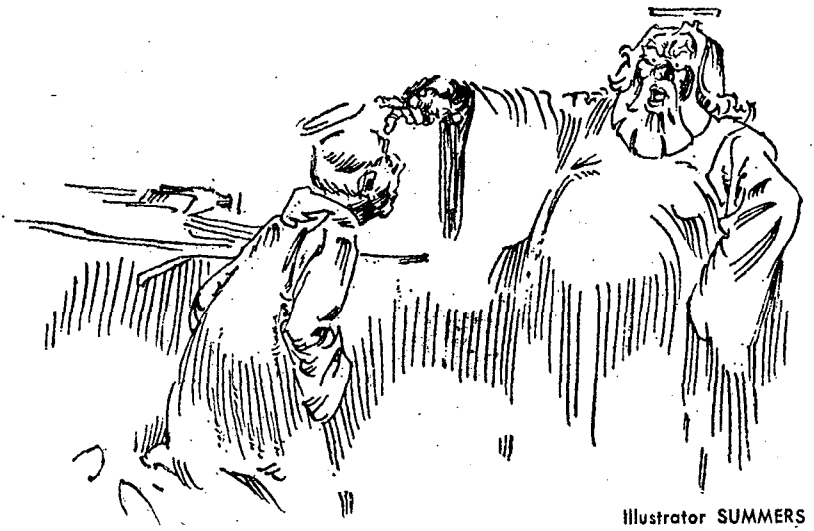
Something was buzzing in his ears. He concentrated on it and found it to be conversation. He deduced that some people had come into the room.

"Poor darling," a voice sobbed, "he looks so peaceful."

"There, there, Mrs. Bascomb. Your husband died a patriot's death . . . a general in the advancing armies of the government."

He opened his eyes again and started to tell them to stop this nonsense, that he was as alive as ever; then he noticed a most peculiar phenomenon. He actually seemed to be rising into the air, not his body, but *him*. He floated easily out of his mortal sheath to a vantage point above his wife's head. Apparently she did not observe the maneuver, or she would be shouting, "Come down from there this *instant*, Fromshire!" He cavorted about their heads, testing his new talent. A sharp Immelman turn brought him next to the ear of his wife's brother, Alfred. Alfred was some sort of businessman, engaged in the disreputable practice of producing goods.

Bascomb whispered softly, "Filthy capitalist!" Alfred looked a little uncomfortable, but gave no other sign of having heard the words. Bascomb shied away and ascended like a wind-blown feather.



Illustrator SUMMERS

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Bascomb decided that flying was a most exhilarating sensation. It was also good evidence that he was dead.

IT took him a little while to understand that his life was over; but, once he had done so, and had reconciled himself to the grave loss to the government and to his family, he found himself eager to explore the after-life.

So far, death hadn't been bad at all, he decided, as he rose easily upward through the floors of the hospital. Soon, like a swimmer breaking surface, he slipped through the roof into the upper air, and turned his face toward the clouds.

He glanced downward once, at about 10,000 feet, at the crowded city on the Potomac, feeling a rush of affection toward the place, with its loquacious lobbyists and lounging legislators, its atmosphere of impending History breathing hot on one's neck.

He quickly forgot this nostalgia when he passed the first outpost of Heaven. It consisted of a small, plump cherub sitting on a small, plump cloud and holding a sign:

PEARLY GATES STRAIGHT AHEAD
30,000 FEET

The cherub pointed upward and grinned. Most informal, thought Bascomb disapprovingly. He bravely elected to play along with the methods of the Administration here, anyhow. They couldn't be worse than Republicans.

He was wondering how to greet the Chief Executive when he passed more strata of clouds from which emanated the soft sound of seraphic singing. His heart bounded and he zoomed upward, smack into a fat cumulus cloud.

Emerging on its upper side, he saw a tremendous edifice before him. It was to the Pentagon what the Pentagon is to an outhouse; and its upper stories disappeared into the dissolving mists of the heavens. Admirable, admirable, thought Bascomb.

He strode confidently through the great doors underneath the placard "CELESTIAL RECEPTION CENTER" and up to the desk where a bored young lady was manicuring her nails. She did not look up at him.

"Harrumph," coughed Bascomb.

No effect.

Bascomb rapped the desk with his knuckles. "See - here," he barked, "I'm not accustomed to waiting!"

The young lady put down her nail-file, stared at him coldly, stifled a yawn, and said, "Well, that certainly is a pity, because you're going to do a lot of it." She gestured feebly at the va-

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cated desks behind her. "The interviewing staff is out to lunch and you'll just have to wait till they get back."

"When will they be back?"

"About 4:30 Sidereal Time."

"When does the office close?"

"About 4:30 Sidereal Time."

"What?"

"Oh, very well. I'll take your application." She took from her desk a sheaf of papers about three inches thick. Bascomb wondered if it was a committee report, and glanced at its title. It was "Heavenly Entrance Petition".

"Is *that* the application blank?" cried Bascomb in a shaking voice.

"Yes. Your name, please? Sex on Earth? Spiritual Security Number?"

Bascomb was trembling violently. "Spiritual Security Number? What's that?"

"Do you mean to say that you don't have your S. S. card yet? You'll have to get that first before you can apply here."

"Where do I go?" groaned Bascomb.

"Over at Sirius II. Turn left at Pluto and you can't miss it. Only a few million million light years away."

Bascomb turned away.

HE made pretty good time on the trip, everything considered. Of course, it didn't improve his outlook when he was severely buffeted by a storm of firmament that blew him several parsecs off his course and finally released him so close to Betelgeuse that his wings were badly singed. He was sitting mournfully on a meteor when a comet whizzed by, bearing the legend "Astral Cab"; but when he tried to flag it, the hackie simply called, "All full up, bub!"

He arrived on Sirius II considerably bedraggled but still fighting. The plant sported a large metropolis, in which Bascomb found a sumptuous building proclaimed in neon to be the "Heavenly Hotel". Its lobby was well-furnished, having such decorations as palm trees bearing fifths of nectar and comely young nymphs dressed as bellhops. This is something I like, thought Bascomb as he walked to the desk and picked up the pen to sign the register.

"Just a moment, sir," said the room clerk frigidly. "Have you a reservation?"

Without a word, Bascomb slunk from the lobby.

The snickering doorman informed him that he could find the offices of the Spiritual Security Board on the 5,112th floor of the Job Building. Bascomb caught an elevator cloud on the way up, was disgorged after a giddy flight that upset his stomach, and weaved into the suite.

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When he entered the reception room, he felt trapped. The secretary's desk and two typewriters were unmanned; but three young angels were gathered in a huddle in the back of the office:

"So I says to this archangel, I says, you can take your old platinum halo, but lay off that stuff with me, see . . ."

Bascomb had an inspiration. They were paying no attention to him; possibly he could slip into the inner office unnoticed. If only he could talk to a fellow Administrator . . .

Moving more quickly than he had since his undergraduate days, he had the door open and closed behind him before the receptionist could finish her snarling cry, "Hey you, where d'you think you're going?"

Breathing hard, he leaned against the door. Partially hidden behind stacks of papers were two men grimly engaged in a game of 4-D tic-tac-toe.

"Beg your pardon, gentlemen . . . My name is Bascomb . . . Head of POA back in DC." That's it, Fromshire, he told himself, give 'em the old initials. "Have a cigar, gentlemen?"

The middle-aged angel on the left said coldly, "Cigars? We don't use them Up Here. Don't happen to have a hunk of manna on you, do you?"

"No . . . no, I'm sorry, I don't, but I'll get you some soon, I promise . . . only, please, tell me how to get to Heaven . . ." Bascomb was suddenly aware that he was becoming hysterical. He got up from knees and tried to get control of himself.

The older angel on the right stood up, pointed an index finger upward, and spoke in the voice that Moses must have used when laying down the Law:

"THROUGH CHANNELS, OLD MAN, THE PROPER CHANNELS!!!"

The rolling syllables merged with a growing growl of thunder; there was a puff of sulphurous smoke; and Bascomb saw a vision of a great plain, stretching into the misty distances. On its horizon stood a single giant desk covered with mounds of forms and papers; and waiting in a line as long as infinity were countless millions: Roman senators, nobles from the courts of the latter Bourbon monarchs, Tsarist aristocrats, a few oddly-dressed individuals having a distinctly Mongoloid cast to the features, Colonel Blimp and some of his colleagues; and near the head of the line was a group of creatures about five feet high and built much along the lines of ants, bearing a banner which spelled, "Delegation from the Martian Bureaucracy".

Then, as suddenly as it had come, the vision was gone.

(*Continued on page 106*)

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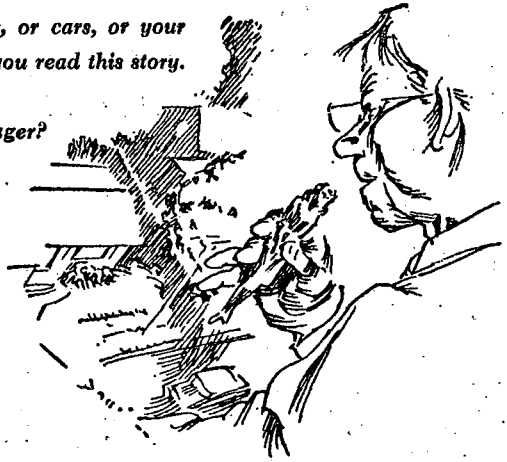
THE GRASS, MORE GREEN

By W. LEE TOMERLIN

Illustrator SUMMERS

Play with your model trains, or cars, or your make-believe village, before you read this story. Afterwards, you may be too . . . frightened? . . . eager?



ISN'T it marvelous, how they make these things look so real?"

These strange words of greeting, if they could be called that, were the first I'd heard from Bob Loeffler in nearly five years. Since he'd married. He and I had met in the Navy, in the South Pacific. We'd bummed around the Philippine Islands together, getting into various kinds of trouble and out of it again. After returning to the States we both bought the same type of sports cars, double dated, and talked about electronics and girls.

Ethel had been one of the girls.

She'd seemed quite nice before they were married—but afterwards, old easygoing Bob was brought to earth with a bang. She had to have a big, solid car, big, solid furniture, color TV and plenty of money to spend. On herself. She didn't object to me, or anything like that—but when Bob began looking over his shoulder (for the pursuing devils), and saying "Yes, Dear," a hundred times an hour—

I stopped visiting them.

I don't suppose I should have been surprised at the way he looked after those five years, kind of haggard and stooped over, but I was. He looked henpecked, I guess you'd say, and before he'd looked . . . happy.

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Normal. And to find him in a toy store—that's where we were, I was buying a Christmas present for my nephew—was also peculiar, because I didn't think they had any children.

"I was on my way out when I saw them," he said. "Bought a doll for my wife's niece, and I guess it's the first time I ever noticed how perfectly they're made. Look." I looked. "Them" was a collection of miniatures—autos, houses, stores, trains—the works. Bob reached over and took one from its place on the display table. It was a Volkswagen Camper. He held it, with a sort of protective attitude, a few inches from his eyes.

"I've always wanted one of these," he said softly, "the real one, I mean. Ever since I sold the Austin-Healey. But Ethel . . ." *That* figures, I said to myself.

There was a little tremor in his voice, though I couldn't tell whether of surpressed excitement or of self pity. My silence was becoming uncomfortable for me—although I don't think he'd noticed at all.

"It's nearly Christmas, Bob. Why don't you treat yourself and buy it?"

"I . . . I don't have enough money . . . on me," he said, embarrassed.

"But they only cost a buck!" I said, without thinking it through.

"Anyhow," he said, quickly replacing the model, "I have to get on home now. Why don't you stop around sometime before the holidays are over?" I nodded, saying that I would try. He smiled a little at that, we shook hands, and he left.

I went ahead and made my purchase. But as I was leaving, the display table caught my eye again. And damned if he wasn't right! They *did* look real! Then, out of seasonal spirit, or perhaps shame because she wouldn't give him a dollar, I don't know which, I started picking things out. The Camper, an "E" Jaguar, a Porsche; four houses; a gas station; three lamp posts (which lit); a little market and a drug store. I had the store gift wrap the package, and ordered it delivered on Christmas morning. Then I left, feeling pretty good. I'd have probably felt even better, had I known what was coming . . .

* * *

CHRISTMAS arrived long before I was ready for it, as usual—you know how it is. But somehow I made it through the family reunion, breakfast and the package opening without forgetting anything serious. Then the telephone rang. It was Bob. He sounded like a kid with a new toy— No, that's not right, I don't want to give you the wrong impression. But he sounded ex-

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cited, real excited, all the way down.

"Hey, listen, these are great, just wonderful," he said. "Listen, do you know yours was the only present I got? That's all right, I don't care. This is the best Christmas I've had since I was little. Even then. I can't tell you—Listen, how about coming over tonight? Will you?"

"Sorry, Bob," I said, "the family—"

"Oh, yeah, of course," he broke in. "I forgot. Well, how about tomorrow night?"

"All right, I'll be glad to come. Around eight?"

"Good, swell. I'll see you then."

After he'd said good-bye, I stood there a minute, trying to decide why I'd agreed to go over. Wondering what Ethel's reaction to the models would be? As if I didn't know . . .

"Well, I'll leave you *men* to play with your toys."

It's a wonder she didn't feel the look Bob gave her as she turned to leave. But even before she had gotten out of the basement room, he seemed to have forgotten she existed. His concentration, the attitude of his body, his whole being was focused on what lay spread out on top of an old tennis table.

It was frightening. At first, my eyes refused to focus properly; or perhaps it was my mind, unable to grasp what my eyes saw. Because it all looked so very real that for a moment it was hard not to believe I was looking at an actual village from, perhaps, a mile away. Then I recognized the cars and buildings I had bought. They were all there, and more. Many more. And the landscaping—rolling green hills, trees, hedges—plaster and paint, but *real!* I heard the click of a switch, and every one of those little houses and shops lit up, as well as a dozen old-fashioned street lamps!

"Isn't it great?" he whispered. "You can almost imagine —"

"Yes," I said, "you can. But you must have been working on this thing ever since you called me yesterday morning!"

His eyes were shining as he answered. "I didn't even go to bed last night. I had to work on Ethel, too, to get the money for the rest of the things, but I got it. And I'm not through. Now I'm working on people!" He showed me the tiny figure of a girl, or, rather, a woman. It—she—was beautiful. Long, silvery hair, golden skin, and dressed in a short, shimmering green tunic. I was impressed.

"Very pretty," I said.

"She's my prize," he replied; and gently stood her in front of one of the little houses. "This is where she would be standing,

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waiting for someone to come home."

That took a moment to sink in; but when it did, I began to get little cold shivers all over. It was the way he said, "someone."

Before I could speak he started showing me how he'd made the little doll figure. But soon he was completely engrossed, and a little later I made my way out of the house without being shown the door. Ethel was presumably asleep, and Bob had forgotten I was even there.

* * *

THE next morning it was back to work on an article that was two weeks overdue, and had been laid aside for the holidays. The memory of the night before slid away to the back of my mind. There it would have gathered dust indefinitely, I guess, if I hadn't picked up the phone two days later and heard Ethel's voice shouting at me. She was barely coherent.

"*You* started all this! *You* gave him those damn toys! Now he won't come out, won't eat, won't—"

I tried to break in, so that I could ask what she was talking about. No use: there is a feedback effect in telephones, and she was hollering so loud I thought she probably wouldn't hear even if I hung up. I hung up.

About fifteen minutes later I got to Bob's house. I knocked for a minute, but no one answered, so I walked in. The only sound inside was a dull thudding from the rear; I went through.

Ethel was in front of the basement door, bearing on it with her pudgy fists. So far as I could tell, there was no reply. When she saw me, she started a hysterical jabbering, the same stuff I'd gotten over the phone. To bring her to her senses, I suppose I should then have slapped her. That's what I understand is done in such cases, and that's the way I'd have written it. I didn't, though. I was afraid she'd slap me back.

In a few moments I had the story anyway, piecing together fragments of her babbling: Bob hadn't come out of the cellar since I'd left, not even for food. Locked the door from the inside. The only way she said she knew he was alive was by the occasional sounds he made at his work.

"And he hasn't gone back to his job! What if he loses it? What'll I do then?" His *job* she was worried about! What a woman!

I went over and listened. It was absolutely quiet downstairs. I knocked softly and called. No reply. I knocked harder, and asked him to open the door. Still nothing.

"All right, kick it down!" she

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ordered. So I kicked and sprained my ankle. Then I asked if she had a bedroom key—these things fit all the inside doors in older houses—and she did. I opened the door with it, and went part way down the stairs, aware that Ethel was right behind me. Still there was no sound at all.

It was dark down there, but not in the normal way. The light was on, I saw, but it didn't cast any brightness. It was just . . . on. A spot, lighter in shade than the rest of the ceiling. At the same time, however, I could with difficulty see everything in the subterranean room, which was cast with a sort of misty green.

ALL this I took in with one sweep of my eyes. Then my attention was captured by Bob's still figure, seated on a tall bar stool. He was hunched over the lighted village, which I could see was now minutely complete. And there was the tiny, silver-haired woman, just as Bob had placed her.

I can't say whether or not I tried to go on down the remaining steps. I don't think so, because I felt or sensed a barrier, perhaps you would call it a forbidding atmosphere, between us. Then Ethel screamed, and I saw why. The pattern of lines and colors which my mind identified as "Bob" was becoming indistinct, wavy, hard to see. The little town was the same way. Colors seemed to swirl and merge. The greenish glow intensified, then began to wane.

In the dimness it was difficult to tell Bob from his creation—they appeared to run together, like two shades of paint being mixed in one can. I felt dizzy and helpless, standing there, as the darkness closed in on them . . .

A moment later the ceiling light "came up" with unexpected brilliance, and by the time my dazzled eyes had readjusted, Bob, the houses, cars, stores and dolls—everything was gone. Vanished. Only the wooden barstool and green table remained.

Somehow I felt cheated, and lonely . . . Left behind.

* * *

The next day the police were around, wanting answers. Parallel universes? Teleportation? We imagine the world in which we live? Those would have landed me in the nuthouse. "It was too dark to see anything down there," was all they got, over and over. They went away.

But I can tell the story, now. You see, I just finished building my own little town. It's just like Bob's.

Maybe we'll be neighbors.

THE END

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CONCLUSION

A Hoax In Time

By KEITH LAUMER

Synopsis of Parts One and Two

EXPERIMENTING with the immense computer occupying the cellars of the century-old mansion bequeathed to him by his Great-grandfather, Chester W. Chester IV and his pal Case Mulvihill, former carny hand and acrobat, discover that the machine has the ability to present remarkably life-like views of any scene requested, drawing on its vast knowledge gathered in a hundred years of coding and storing information, and utilizing a Tri-D wall, complete with sound, smells, and authentic settings.

They see the possibility of using the device to raise money to pay off the outstanding tax bill of several million credits; not by offering a mere information service, but by convincing the Internal Revenue officials that they have on hand a real, live TIME MACHINE.

They present the proposal to

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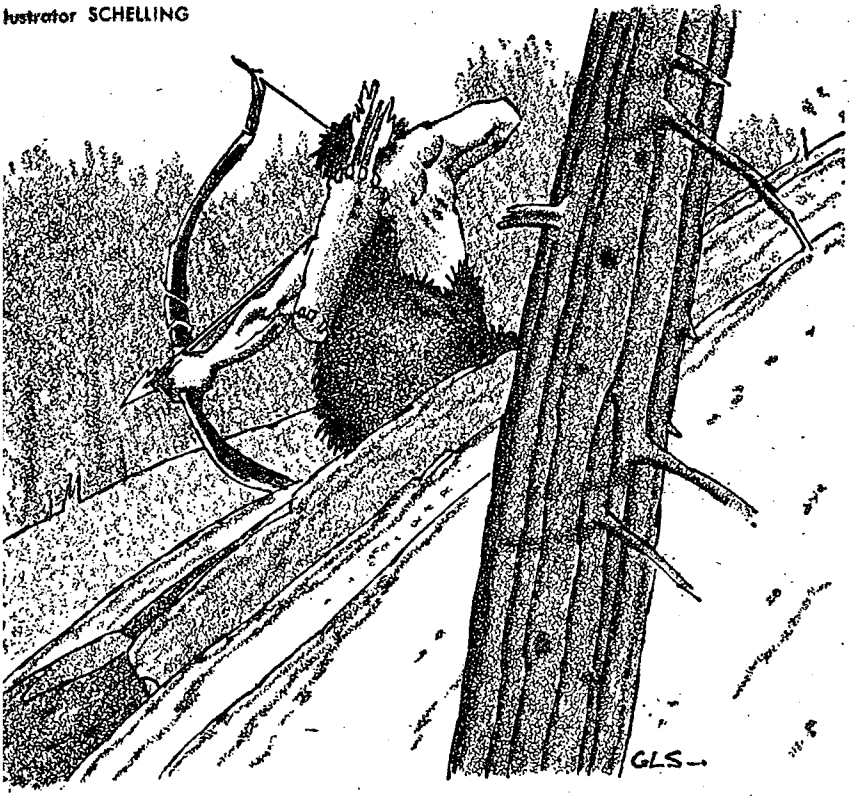
Illustrator SCHELLING



the Internal Revenue Bureau. Faced with the loss of the entire tax bill by forfeiture as the price of non-cooperation, the IRB agrees to witness a demonstration. Case and Chester prepare a temporary theatre in the ballroom of the mansion—with four Tri-D walls for added realism. They also instruct the computer to use its vast resources to improvise a mobile speaker which will blend with the views of the past to carry on a running commentary.

The day of the demonstration arrives. Mssrs Nastry and Overfog of the Bureau are due in five minutes. As a last-minute check of the equipment, Case suggests a trial view of Neolithic Man; a full-color, three-dimensionsl, life-size, four-wall presentation. When the machine begins to discuss the technicalities involved, Chester cuts it short. "Realism—

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in the simplest possible way," he insists.

At this point, the wall suddenly shimmers, and dissolves to a view of a cobbled market square, thronged with people. A magnificently muscled man with an oddly-familiar face steps forward—and at the same moment, Case and Genie notice that Chester has apparently vanished!

"Case and Genie," the stranger on the wall says urgently. "Listen carefully. What I have to say is of vital importance. You have just instructed the computer to show you scenes of Neolithic life—and instead, this village square came into view.

"But not the first time . . .

"There has been a lapse; much has happened of which you have no memory. Once before, when you gave the order, the scene you asked for appeared on the screens . . ."

On that other occasion, the young man goes on, the walls faded from view, to be replaced by a view of rolling grassland—across which a beautiful young girl approaches, dressed in a suntan and a warm smile.

"My name's Genie," she explains. "I'm the mobile speaker . . ." Her costume, she points out, is authentic for the period.

Small men with large beards emerge from the brush. Case and Chester lounge in their yellow brocaded chairs and watch with amusement as the primitives shout, shake weapons—and then charge.

"Relax, Chester," Case says. "It' only a picture—"

But their smiles vanish abruptly as the bearded men pelt across the rug and engulf them.

Chester recovers consciousness in a wicker case; nearby, Case and Genie are similarly imprisoned. Genie, separated from the machine, seems to know no more about their situation than any other girl of eighteen might.

They agree on a plan: Case will put on a demonstration of juggling to divert the natives, while Chester and Genie cut their way free and return to the rug and chairs that mark the position of the computer. They succeed, and at once order the computer to return them to the Chester mansion. There they find guns—and clothes for Genie—but decide not to venture out for other supplies, since a dense fog surrounds the house.

They return to the Neolithic scene, and make their way back to the village from which they escaped an hour earlier—but all is changed. Neat cottages of stone and wood line a tidy steet; tall, healthy natives in gay print garments welcome them with songs—sung in English. An ancient man with a bushy white beard emerges from a house and comes up to them. He looks them

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over carefully; then he speaks:

"So you finally came back after all . . ."

CASE, it seems, has spent thirty years in the Neolithic village—and has improved living standards by a remarkably sound program of land clearance, simple agriculture, mining and animal husbandry, and fishing. The people have been organized in villages of no more than three hundred inhabitants; Case has taught them to build boats, paint pictures, weave and dye cloth, and has insisted on a rigorous schedule of such varied disciplines as juggling, rope-walking, weight-lifting, and swimming.

Far from being angry with Chester at the thirty year delay in his rescue, he insists that these have been the best years of his life. He is now ready, however, to return home. The three return to the rug and the brocaded chairs; Case says his farewells, and the machine is ordered to return them to their starting point. But instead of the familiar wall of the Chester house, a crowded village square appears—and Genie announces, in great distress, that she has lost contact with the computer; that it, in fact, no longer exists!

A dignified elder in a pink robe approaches from the crowd, and calmly engages the trio in a discussion of a Probability Crisis predicted by Vasawalie, a Randomist leader—who shortly arrives and claims custody of the new arrivals as objects of scientific interest and study. Norgo, the old man who first spoke to them, insists that they be treated as honored guests of the Tricennium.

The basis of Tricennium philosophical thought, they quickly learn, is a mysterious audio transmission known as the Background Paradox, which has been known since the birth of Tricennium electronics, ages in the past. Curious, Chester and Case ask to hear the voice, which, they are told, is heard at five minute intervals, day and night, on the special radio equipment in the Probability Laboratory. To their astonishment, the voice is that of the computer, calling for Chester! There is, however, no means of replying to the apparently sourceless signal—and Chester's insistence that the call is more than a random coincidence merely sets off a new round of philosophical dispute at an abstract theoretical level.

Marooned permanently in this irrational—but extremely stimulating society, Chester, Case and Genie resign themselves gracefully. Genie's vast education is quickly recognized, and she is caught up in the gay whirl of Tricennium intellectual life. Case

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is also soon integrated into the local society, teaching the athletic local youth new nuances in the fine arts of juggling and acrobatics. Chester is left to idle in the village park, since he posseses no skills more socially useful than bridge.

In desperation, he asks Norgo for advice, and is offered an opportunity as subject of an educational experiment. An attempt will be made to impart to Chester —whom Norgo describes as an organically normal but totally undeveloped adult—a full Tricennium education in a single year of intensive training. Chester agrees.

After the first day at the Research Center under the unemotional tutelage of a brilliant teacher named Kuve, Chester's body and mind ache with the pressure of new learning—and his head rings with the basic theorem of rationality:

"Is not is not not is; not is is not is not . . ."

THE first grey of dawn had not yet lit the sky when Chester tottered into the softly lit gymnasium. Kuve, fresh and immaculate in white, looked up from a small table set up in the middle of the room.

"Good morning, Chester. You slept well?"

"Like a four-day corpse. And I feel equally lively now."

"Still, you're out of bed at the appointed time, dressed for work. And since you're here, you might just take a look at this."

Chester hobbled over to the table. Under a surface of beaded glass, pin points of red, green, and amber light winked off and on in an unpredictable sequence.

"I want you to analyze the pattern here. When you're ready, put your finger on the indicator light here at the edge which matches the color of the light which you think will blink on next."

Chester studied the light board. A red light blinked, then a green, another red, another, an amber, a green . . . He touched the red light. The board blanked off.

"That means you chose wrongly. Try again with a new pattern." Chester followed the lights. Green, red, amber, red, amber, green, green, red, green, amber . . .

He touched the amber light. The board blanked.

"Never accept the first level of complexity as a solution to a problem, Chester. Look beneath the surface; find the subtler patterns. Try again."

The lights blinked in steady sequence. On the fifth try, the entire board lit up. Chester looked pleased.

"Good," said Juve. "When you have three correct solutions in

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sequence, we'll move on to patterns of a higher complexity."

"I had to think five lights ahead on the last one, Kuve. The patterns seem to change while I'm watching them."

"Yes, there's a simple developmental progression involved in this set."

"You're asking too much. I have more the poetic type mind. I'm no electronic calculator."

"You'll think you are, before the year is out. This training, in its advanced phases, by applying pressures of a type never encountered in ordinary experience, will develop cortical areas hitherto unused."

"I don't think I'm going to enjoy that last part," said Chester dubiously. "What does it mean?"

Kuve pointed to the far wall. "Look over there. Keep your eyes rigidly before you." He held up a hand at the edge of Chester's field of vision, moving it slowly. "Tell me when you can clearly discern my hand."

"I see it now." Chester was looking straight ahead; Kuve's hand was three feet from Chester's forehead, well off to one side.

"How many fingers am I holding up?"

"I don't know; I can just barely tell there's a hand there."

Kuve waggled a finger. "Did you notice that movement?"

"Certainly."

Kuve moved a second finger, stilling the first, then a third finger, and a fourth.

"You saw the movement each time," he summed up, "which indicates that all four fingers are within your field of view." He extended two fingers. "Now how many fingers am I holding up?"

"I still can't tell."

"You can see the fingers, Chester, you've proven that. And yet you are, quite literally, unable to count these fingers which you see. The message sent to your brain through the portion of the optical mechanism concerned with peripheral vision is channeled to an undeveloped sector of your mind, a part of the great mass of normally unused cells in the cortex. The intelligence of this portion of your intellect is about at a par with that of the faithful dog which recognizes a group of children but is unable to formulate any conception of their number." He lowered his hand. "It is that portion of the brain which we shall train. Now, try this next pattern . . ."

IX

CHESTER leaned against the rail at the top of the eighty-foot tower, feeling the hot sun on his shoulders, and watched as Kuve adjusted the ropes stretched across the pool below.

"This gives you a four-foot

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target," Kuve's voice said from the rice-grain-sized instrument set in the bone behind Chester's left ear. "Remember your vasco-muscular tension patterns. Wait for the signal."

A beep sounded in Chester's ear—and he was in the air, wind shrieking past his ears, his chin to his chest, arms at his sides with hands flat, feet pointed . . .

He struck, twisted, shot above the surface, swam to the edge, and pulled himself up with a single smooth motion.

"You've come along well these first two weeks," Kuve said, motioning Chester to the table where a small steak waited. "You've explored the parameters of your native abilities, you've established an awareness of the values we're dealing with, and overcome the worst of the metabolic inertia. Your musculatore is balanced now and in good tone, though you still have a long way to go in developing full bulk and power. Now you're ready to attack the subtler disciplines of balance, timing, precision, endurance, and pace—"

"You talk as though I had none of those. What about the high dives? That four-foot target isn't very big from eighty feet up."

"That exercise was designed to develop your self-confidence. The target merely defines the spot to which you naturally fall. Could you do as well if it were moved over ten feet?"

"No, I suppose not."

"The only real skills involved are the simple reflex-control routines you've practiced during your work-outs. Now you'll begin the real substance of your studies. We'll begin with simple games like fencing, riding, rope-work, juggling, dancing, and sleight of hand, and proceed by degrees into the more abstract phases."

"What are you training me for, a side-show?"

KUVE ignored the interruption. "Your academic studies will be concentrated on hypnotism, self-hypnosis, selective concentration, advanced mnemonics, and eidetics, from which we will proceed to autonomics, self-regeneration, cellular psychology, and—

"Let's go back to fencing. At least I know what that is."

"After you've dined we'll begin. In the meantime, tell me what the word 'now' means."

Chester cut a bite of steak. "It means 'this moment'."

"The moment in which you put that bite into your mouth?"

"No," said Chester, chewing. "'Now' changes. It moves along with time. It's the *present* moment."

"How long does 'now' endure?"

"Well—forever, I suppose."

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"Then 'now' includes all of time?"

"No, it's the other way around. Every moment is 'now' for a while, and then it isn't."

"For a while? How long?"

"Not very long; an instant."

"Is 'now' a part of the past?"

"No, certainly not."

"The future?"

"No, the future, by definition, hasn't happened yet. The past is already finished. 'Now' falls between them."

"How would you define a plane, Chester?"

"The intersection of two solids."

"And a line?"

"The intersection of two planes."

"A point?"

"The intersection of two lines."

"The position of intersection, to be more precise," said Kuve, "'Line' and 'point' are terms referring to positions, not things. If a sheet of paper is cut in two, every molecule of the paper is contained in one or other of the halves. If the cut edges are placed together, every particle is still to be found in one or other of the parts; none are excluded. And the line we see dividing them is only a position, not a material object."

"Yes, that's obvious."

"Past time may be considered as one of the parts of the paper, future time as the other. Between them is . . . nothing."

"Still, I'm sitting here eating my lunch. I exist at some time or other."

"I want you to grasp the fact that your ability to conceptualize falls short of the ability of the universe to proliferate complexities. Human understanding can never be more than an approximation. Avoid dealing in absolutes. And never edit reality for the sake of simplicity. The results are fatal to logical thinking."

MINA appeared on the terrace, wearing a close-fitting pink coverall and carrying foils and face masks. She greeted Kuve and Chester, selected a mask, and picked up a foil that whistled as she tested its temper with slashing cuts at the air. Chester finished his steak, pulled on a black coverall of tough resilient material, took the foil that Mina handed him.

"This is where I begin, I guess?" he said, with a quizzical look at the other two.

Kuve nodded. "Go ahead."

Mina took up her position, gripped her slender blade, arm and wrist straight, feet at right angles, left hand on hip. She tapped Chester's blade, then with a sudden flick sent it flying into the pool.

"Oh, I'm sorry, Chester. You

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weren't ready." Chester retrieved the foil, assumed a stance in imitation of Mina's. They crossed blades—and Chester oofed as Mina's point prodded his chest. Mina laughed merrily.

On the third try Mina locked Chester's blade with hers, then, with a twist, plucked it from his hand. "Chester," she laughed, "you couldn't be trying . . ." She laid her weapon aside and strolled off. Chester turned to Kuve, face red. Kuve stepped forward, motioned Chester into position.

"We'll have half an hour each morning and another after lunch," he said.

AFTER nine months, Case and Genie probably think I'm dead," said Chester, circling Kuve warily, bare feet shuffling on the padded mat. "I don't understand why I can't at least write them a letter."

"They were told you were taking part in an experiment," said Kuve. He stepped in, his right hand flashing past Chester's ribs and up to grasp the wrist forced back by his left hand. Chester twisted, caught Kuve's left hand, forced the wrist joint down. Kuve leaned to relieve the pressure, shifting his hold to Chester's neck, then threw his hip against Chester's side, and heaved. In mid-air Chester brought a leg up, clipped Kuve's jaw with his knee, twisted to land on all fours as Kuve's grip slipped free. Kuve shook his head, looking surprised. "Was that an accident, or was—"

Chester hit him low, dodged left to avoid a headlock, clamped an arm over Kuve's head, and reached for an ankle—

And was up-ended and slammed on the mat. He sat up, rubbing his neck. Kuve nodded approvingly. "You're coming along, Chester. If you hadn't been careless with your footwork just now, you might have pinned me."

"Maybe next time," Chester said grimly.

"I seem to note a certain suppressed hostility in your tone," Kuve said, eyeing Chester with amusement.

"Suppresed, hell. You've worked on me like a rented tractor for nine months, strained my brains while I ate and slept, kept me locked in here—"

"You can leave at any time," Kuve said blandly. "You're a volunteer."

"It's a little late for that. Only three months to go. Why don't you tell me how I'm doing—"

"Only now, I commented on your progress."

"Sure. And I can look at my forearm and see that it's bigger. But that doesn't tell me whether I've covered all the ground I was supposed to. And this idea of allowing no mirrors, so I can't so

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much as admire my muscles—

"Which reminds me: your last physiometric check indicates a need for more emphasis on the complex-F group. I think I'll add two ounces to your standard set and increase the repetitions five percent across the board."

"You said something about a new compound-reaction test situation I was going to see soon. What about it?"

"That's where we're going now. It's a very interesting problem group—but I warn you, it can be painful."

"In that respect it fits in nicely with the overall program." Chester followed Kuve across the terrace, through an arch, along a corridor, and out into an open court. Kuve pointed to a gate in the wall beyond which a patch of woods pressed close.

"Just go through the gate, Chester, and have a stroll in the forest. You'll find paths; whether you use them is left entirely to your own discretion. This is a tongue of the forest that runs up into the hills. I don't think you'll be in danger of straying too far, for reasons which will become apparent once you're in the forest—but nevertheless I'll caution you to stay close. As soon as you've made what you consider to be a significant observation, return."

Chester glanced toward the shadowed depths of the wood. "It will be an agreeable change: my first trip outside the prison grounds."

"Be back by dark. If you get into trouble, remember I'll be monitoring your communicator personally."

"Fine. And when in doubt, I'll just remember: Is not is not not is," said Chester as he turned down the path.

CHESTER was moving along the path at a steady pace, his eyes roving over his surroundings in a wide-scope comparison pattern. He had practiced the exercise during hundreds of five-minute sessions on the trainer. But it was different, using it now in a natural setting.

A movement caught his eye; in instant response Chester threw himself backward, feet high. A rope whipped across his calves; then the noose was dangling high in the air. Chester came to his feet carefully, searching for a back-up trap, saw none. He studied the tree to which the rope was attached, then moved off the trail to a nearby oak, scaled it quickly, moved out on a long branch, then dropped into the trapped tree. He untied the rope, a tough half-inch synthetic, wrapped it around his waist, then slid back to the ground.

If Kuve had trapped the trail, it would be a good idea to leave it. Chester moved into the under-

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brush, working his way toward a line of larger trees. In their shade the underbrush would be less dense.

He froze at a sharp pain in the back of a hand. Carefully he disengaged himself from a coil of fine-gauge barbed wire. Selecting a strand between barbs, he bent it backward and forward rapidly until it parted. He repeated the process with other strands, then went to hands and knees and eased under the barrier. It would be wise now to be on the alert for subtler obstacles. The nuisances he had encountered so far had apparently been intended only to relax his defenses.

Half an hour later Chester stood on the brink of a sheer bluff. Fifty feet below a stream glinted in a shaft of sun that fell between great trees. Upstream, a still pool showed black among smooth boulders. Chester noted the placement of the pool with a smile. It was identical with the four-foot target area into which he had been diving daily—an open invitation.

He lay flat and examined the cliff face. The broken rock surface offered an abundance of hand- and foot-holds. Perhaps too many . . .

It was forty feet to the spreading branches of a large elm growing on the opposite side of the stream. The rope was long enough. Chester uncoiled it from his waist, found a five-pound stone fragment with a pinched center, and tied it securely to the end of the supple line. He stood, whirled the stone around his head four times and let it fly. It arced across the branch, dropped, and hung swinging. Gently, Chester pulled as the rock swung away, relaxed as it returned, pulled again . . . The oscillation built up. As the weight reached the end of its swing Chester pulled sharply. The stone swung up and over, once, twice, three times around the branch. He tugged; all secure. Quickly he knotted his end of the rope about a length of fallen branch, then man-handled a two-hundred pound boulder over it. He tested the attachment briefly, then crossed on the rope hand over hand to the elm. He left the rope in place, descended to the ground, and went to the edge of the quiet pool. Lifting a hundred-pound rock, he tossed it into the center of the black water. Instantly a large net, apparently spring-loaded snapped into view, dripping water, to close over the stone. Chester smiled, raised his eyes to study the base of the cliff. Snarls of fine barbed wire guarded the lower six feet of the vertical rock face. It would have been an easy climb down, he reflected—but a long way back up.

The communicator behind his ear beeped. "Well, Chester, I see

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you've sprung the net at the pool. Don't feel too badly; you did very well. I'll be along to release you in a few minutes . . ."

Chester smiled again and turned back into the forest.

CHESTER studied the sun, briefly reviewed the route he had followed in four hours of detecting and avoiding Kuve's traps. Sunset was just over an hour away, he judged, and he was three miles northwest by north from the Center. He had ignored Kuve's excited calls from the pool . . . and at regular intervals thereafter. There had been no calls now for two hours His instructions had been to note something significant. So far he had seen nothing more noteworthy than smoke columns on the distant ridges. It was time, however, to head back. With luck he could make it by dark. It had been a pleasure to escape Kuve's discipline for a few hours, but he had no desire to spend an autumn night in the woods.

After ten minutes' rapid progress down-slope, he emerged at the rim of a near-vertical slope of loose shale. He scanned the littered surface for a protruding ridge which would offer secure footing, but without success. Fifty feet to the right the drop-off cut back sharply into the slanted meadow above, to join a ravine angling up into the high hills. Chester explored in the opposite direction, found his progress halted by the increasing steepness of the ground. There was no choice but to retrace his route back up-slope, skirt the upper end of the ravine, and descend along the grassy trough visible beyond the cut.

He would, he realized, be rather late in returning to the Center. Still he should be well into the level area near the buildings before complete darkness fell. He moved obliquely up across the clearing and into the shadow of the timber.

CHESTER halted, sniffing the air. The odor of woodsmoke was sharp among the milder scents of pine and juniper and sun-warmed rock. He had been climbing steadily for twenty minutes, and was ready now to angle to the left to clear the upper end of the ravine. With each step the odor of smoke grew more noticeable. Now a soft grey wisp coiled from the shaded trunks ahead and above. Chester crouched low, moved on quickly. If there was a forest fire ahead, it would be necessary to get past it at once—before he was cut off from his route to the valley. He moved silently through sparse underbrush, saw through a gap in the trees a pale flicker of orange on the heights a hundred yards above. It would be close; he broke into a run.

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The trees thinned. The tumbled rocks that marked the head of the gorge showed pale against the dark background of pines. A billow of smoke rolled toward him, carried by a downdraft flowing into the canyon. Chester lay flat, drew half a dozen deep breaths, then jumped up and scrambled over the broken rock. Ahead, fire twinkled among massive boles, flickered in whipping underbrush, leaped high in the crown of a pine. He could hear the roar of wind-driven flames now. A sudden gust blew a wall of smoke toward him. He thought rapidly of taking refuge in the gully—but the draft would bring the smoke there in sucocating waves. It was necessary to retreat. He made his way, coughing, back to the comparative safety of the wooded slope, then paused to study the situation. It might be possible, he calculated, to round the knoll at the head of the rampart that edged his route on the right, then descend safely to emerge into the valley a mile north of the Center. There was no hope now of making it before dark. Chester worked his way higher, still scenting smoke strongly. Another hundred yards, he estimated—

A stone dislodged from above rattled down, bounded off into dense brush. Chester paused, scanning the tangled foliage. A leaf trembled stiffly; almost, Chester thought, as though it were being restrained from moving freely in the gusty breeze. He moved back a cautious step.

Twenty feet up-slope a heavily built man moved into view. He was brown-bearded, dressed in leather pants and a loose jacket of undyed wool. His left fist gripped a massive recurved bow. His right hand was at his chin, two fingers hooked around a taut bowstring. The arrow nocked in the string carried a four-inch head of polished steel, and it was aimed at Chester's navel.

"I know yew Downlan'e's move like Snake Demon when Kezfavver tri'tt him into fire pit, but Blew-tewf leap faster van fought," the bearded man drawled in barely intelligible English. "What dew yew wan' here in Wil' Places? Was yewr life too tame down below?"

Chester frowned, running the sounds of the stranger's barbaric speech through his mind, noting sound substitutions and intonations; the pattern of the dialect was simple enough.

"If yew don' min', I'd ravver Bew-tewth poin'ed over vere somewhere," Chester replied in a passable imitation of the dialect, motioning toward the deep woods, with his eyes on the arrow-head.

"No need yo mock the cant," the man said in clear English. "I was ten when I left my Tricennium. Now, what do you want?"

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"I was rather hoping to discover a route back to the valley, but now I'd settle for merely remaining un-skewered and unbroiled. Do you mind if we move on? The fire is blowing this way, you know."

"Don' worry about fire," the bearded man reverted to dialect. "I set it myse'f to run game. It will bu'n out again' escarpmen' above. Now mewve off to your right an' up pas' me. Blew-tewf will be matchin' every mewve."

"That's not the direction I'm headed," Chester protested.

"Yew'd better dew as I've tol' yew. As yew said, fire is gettin' hot, an' I have tew mewve on." The arrow was still aimed unwaveringly at Chester's stomach. The bow creaked as the bearded man set the arrowhead on the handgrip. "Make up yewr min'."

CHESTER moved quickly in the direction indicated. "Relax, I don't intend to make a break for it. But what in the world do you want with me?"

"Le'ss say I wan' news of Dwonla's."

"Who are you?" Chester called back, pulling himself up the steep route, awkwardly now in the failing light. "What are you doing up here in the hills? If you want news, come down to the Center."

"My na's Bandon, an' I would'n be welcome in yewr dainty Center. Don' tu'n aroun', jus' keep mewvin' along."

"I'm due back at sundown. When I don't show up, they'll come after me."

"If yew're finkin' of little trinket tu'tt away back of yewr ear, forget it. Yew're out of ra'ge."

"You're planning on holding me here for ransom?"

"What treasu'es could Downlan'e's offer tew equal free life of Wil' Places?" Bandon laughed.

"You'll let me go in the morning?"

"Not in morning or for many morning vereafter. Forget tame valleys, Downlan'e. Yew'll be here until yew die."

* * *

Twilight was fading from the peaks as Chester and Bandon clambered over a last barrier of fallen rock to level ground. Against a backdrop of tall pines a dozen tall skin tents dotted the high meadow. In their middle stood a log shack, a curl of smoke drifting up from its massive chimney.

"Vis is it, Downlan'e," Bandon said, "Vere's fewd here, an' a fire again' night chill, an' strong ale, an' ta'es of forest, and fellowship of hunte's: all a man need between dus' an' dawn."

"Very poetic," said Chester. "But you left out a few items that I've grown accustomed to, like literature, and celery, and dentists, and clean socks. Why do I

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have to join your club? After all I—"

"Yew came here uninvited," Bandon said flatly. He lowered and unstrung his bow. "Don' be so fewlish as tew try tew leave. Vere are sentries pos'ed tew gua'd our approaches."

"I know; I saw them."

"In vis light? Our bes' woodsmen?"

"Just joking," said Chetser.

"Maybe yew did, at vat. Yew Downland'e's are keen-eyed as Kez-fahver himse'f. Tell me, where did yew lea'n can'?"

"Your dialect? Oh, I . . . ah . . . studied it. A hobby of mine."

"Ven i's not trew what some say, vat yew can lea'n our speech in wi'k of an eve?"

"A baseless rumor."

"I fought so. Come along now, an' we'll see what brovvers make of yew."

CHESTER estimated the crowd of unshaven, hide-clad hill dwellers who surrounded him at fifty individuals, all male. None of them, he reflected, of the kind who would arouse a desire for further acquaintance.

"Vis Downlan'e's a gues'," Bandon was saying to the assembled brethren. "We'll treat him as one of us—unless he tries tew go somewhere. Now, I'm takin' him in palace wiv me—jus' until he can get a place of his own fix' up. I wa'n yew now: if he come tew ha'm, I'll hol' lot of yew personally responsible."

A short, incredibly broad man in fur coveralls black with dirt swaggered forward. "We hea'd a lot about how tough vese Downlan'e's are," he growled. "Vis one don' look so tough."

"Maybe he's sma't—va's better yet," Bandon snapped. "Leave him alone, Grizz. Va's an order."

Grizz looked around at his fellows. "Funny, none of us is good enough tew get tew sleep in palace. But vis spy here wa's in an' right away he's treated like Kezfahver when he wen' tew fetch king-hat back from sea-bottom."

"Never min' vat. Now yew boys get some cam' fi'es goi' an' roas' up some venison an' break open a few ke's of ale. We're goin' tew have a real celebration here tew show new man what kin' of wil' free life we lead . . ."

A few shouts rang out, a faint yippee sounded from the rear. Grizz stared at Bandon. "We got no venison. Plenty squirrel, if yew don' min' eatin' ra's. Only ale we got is vat half-keg of spoil' brew Tusgu cook' up out of bi'ch ba'k."

"Dew bes' yew can," Bandon snapped. "Look lively about it. I wan' tew see fi's lookin' cheerful aroun' here." He turned to Chester. "Come along tew palace; we'll have a chance tew get acquain'ed before feas'."

Chester followed Bandon to the

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shed, a rickety structure of logs, twenty feet by thirty. Inside, a crude oil lamp cast a flickering yellow light on low rafters hung with pots in thong nets, baskets, the stiff skins of small animals, leather garments stiff with dirt. Bandon gestured toward a heap of dry sticks and limp straw and a shred of a woven blanket. "Yew can take bed tonight," he said; "I'll sleep on floor. Tomorrow we'll get yew ten' of yewr own sta'ted."

"I wouldn't think of it," Chester said hastily. "You have the bed. The floor looks very comfortable, I'm sure. As for the tent—don't you think it might be less trouble all around if I just departed quietly in the morning?"

BANDON was shaking his head emphatically. "I'ss a rewl of Brovverhood: no stra'ge's ever leave here wif ta'es tew tell."

"Tales of what?" Chester inquired interestedly.

"Of how we live here; wil', free life. Vey fink we're sta'vi' up here in hi's, cut og from all sof' life down below. But we're not; we hun', an' eat venison, an' dring stout ale, an' sit aroun' our roarin' cam'fi'es spinnin' ta'es—"

"I don't think that news will qualify as a military secret," Chester said. "Letting me go will pose no threat to your wild, free life."

"I know better," Bandon said darkly, pulling off his jacket to reveal a broad white chest adorned with a crop of black hair. He pulled a stool before the stone fireplace, started piling sticks on the hearth. "We have all we need here; if vey knew it, vey'd be up here in no time, tryin' tew take it away from us. Not vat vey could. We know whoo's like ba's of our ha's. We'd pick 'm off from ambush, whittle 'm down until what was lef' of 'm ran for veir little Tricennia an' veir rewl boo's . . . but veir rew's won' he'p 'm here."

"I see. And so, for humanitarian reasons, you're keeping me here to save the lives of the Downlanders."

Bandon nodded. "An' besi'es, I wan' tew ta'k tew yew."

"What about?"

"About all ki's of fi's, like whew sen' yew here, an' what kin' of pla's yew've got for invadin' Wil' Places, an' . . . yew know. Yew might as well tell me everyfing. I caught yew fair an' square, red-han'ed."

"If you hadn't jumped out at me, I'd have been on my way home now, without ever having known you were here. What are you doing up here? I never heard of anyone living in the hills, in tents."

"Never hea'd of us? Yew expec' me tew believe vat?" Bandon struck a match, set fire to the kindling, piled more wood on it,

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hung a pot of water on a hook. He stood and looked at Chester sternly. "Yew fing we don' know how yew feel about us up here, livin' our wil', free—"

"All right, Bandon, tell me: how do we feel about you and your wild, free life?"

Bandon went to a heavy chest in the corner, used a key on a leather thong tied to his belt to unlock a massive padlock, raised the lid, and took out two brown bottles. He locked the chest, handed Chester a bottle, and seated himself, waving Chester to a stool.

HOW do yew feel? Well, firs', yew're afraid." He drew on his bottle, eying Chester around it. He lowered the bottle and belched. "Yew're afraid because as long as we're livin' here, way we please, followin' no ma's rew's, vere is a ching in yewr armor."

"What armor?" Chester tried the beer. It was good tricennium brew.

"If people knew vey did'n' hav tew knuckle under, did'n' have tew live by rew's made by ovver men, vey'd all chewse our way of life. Ven whe'd yewr precious Tricennia be? Hey?" Bandon drank, one belligerent eye on Chester. "But we don' wan' 'm. Nope. Plenty of rewm here in hi's now; plenty of hun'in', an' rewm tew get out an' get away from city here. Havin' a palace tew live in is fine, shewre; but bein' able tew get away from it, clear away, where all yew can see is trees an' sky, va's livin'."

"You said you lived in a Tricennium until you were ten. Why did you leave?"

"Why dew yew fing? Because wil', free—"

"At the age of ten, what could you have known about the wild, free?"

"Well, of cou'se, my family came tew. Vey brought me. But don' get wrong idea. Vey were glad tew come. Could'n' wait tew get away from vat crowd of hypocri's, meddlin' in a ma's personal business."

"What Tricennium was that?"

Regional Knowledge," Bandon said shortly.

"Is that 'Original Knowledge', by any chance?"

"What I said."

"That's my Tricennium; adopted, of course. I never saw any meddling or hypocrisy there. In fact—"

"Yew jus' get yewrse'f classified as an Overage! Ven yew'll see!"

"How did you come to be an Overage?"

"Vey've got rew's: only so many people tew live in veir precious Tricennium. Yew have a chil' wifout permission—an' i's an Overage. Whole family's Overages. Not wanted. Have tew leave veir home, everyfing—"

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HOLD on," Chester put in. "I know a little something about this. A family can have two children without special permission. If they want more, they either have to get a sponsor, or agree to move out to a colony . . . or start a colony of their own."

"A colony where? In ice-fie's? In dese's? Leave everyfing, all veir fri's, tew sta't ove?"

"They not only take all their possessions with them, but they are given everything needed to set up a self-supporting community. And if they have friends, they can go along—assuming none of these friends is in a position to sponsor a new child. And there's plenty of fine land available, and Climatic Control is making more available all the time."

"I know better. My—"

"How do you know better? Have you ever been back?"

"What, me go back, after treatmen' we got?"

"Who told you all this about the Tricennia being dictatorial, and envying you people your huts up here in the hills?"

"Hu's?" Bandon looked around the room. "Yew're not callin' my palace a hut?"

"I was referring to the tents of your associates," said Chester. "But who told you all this?"

"Everybody knows it."

"All your fellow exiles?"

"Shewre—an' stories vey could tell—"

"Yes, I know: around the roaring campfire while the venison's cooking. How many of them have ever been in a Tricennium?"

"Well, ve's me . . ."

"Go on."

"I guess I'm about only one. But vat ma'es no differe'ce."

Chester finished his beer and laid the bottle aside. "Bandon, I've been in a Tricennium—lately. I know what it's like. And I think you want me to tell you about it. Right?"

Bandon pulled his stool closer. "Shewre, I guess so . . . if yew wan' tew. . . ."

THERE was a bellow outside the palace. Bandon stood up. "Va's vat Grizz again. Never knows when tew stop. . . ." He went to the door. Chester stepped over a row of empty beer bottles, lifted down the pot of hot water, poured in some cool from a wooden bucket by the hearth, and sloshed water over his face and hands. Bandon came back from the door as Chester patted himself dry before the fire.

"Boys got a big fire goin', an' I fing vey roun'ed up some meat. We took care of ale ourse's. Le's join in merrymakin'."

"That fellow Grizz: how long has he been in the club?"

Bandon looked sharply at Chester. "Grizz is one of our bes'

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men. He's been wiv us about a year."

"Where did he come from?"

"Here in Wil' Places, we don' as' a man about his pas.' "

"When did that tradition start? When Grizz arrived?"

"What if it did? I's a good idea."

Outside Chester surveyed a scene of half-hearted festivity. The short squat figure of Grizz detached itself from the shadow of a nearby tent.

"Well, new ma's been makin' himse'f comfo'table," he said loudly. "Say, I been hearin' a lot about yew Downlan'e's. Vey say yew're fas'. I wonder if—"

Grizz made a sudden movement. Chester put up a hand and the bone handle of a hunting knife slapped his palm, fell to the ground.

"Here, Grizz, yew had no call tew frow a knife at our gues'!"

"Never mind, Bandon," Chester said quickly. "He was just kidding."

"Lucky yew happen' tew stick out yewr han' jus' when yew did. It was comin' butt-firs', but it would have hu't. Grizz, leave him alone." Bandon slapped Chester on the back. "I've got tew circulate around a little, ta'k tew a few of boys. Yew get acquain'ed tew."

Chester strolled over to a group standing near the fire. The men eyed him dubiously.

"How do you men like the wild, free life?" Chester asked a lean, round-shouldered fellow.

Grizz thrust heavily after Chester.

"We don' take much tew spies," Grizz rumbled.

"I can see why," said Chester. "If the other half knew what you boys had all to yourselves up here, they'd leave home tomorrow."

"Ve's a way tew handle swam'-wa'ke's," Grizz stated.

"Va's right, Grizz," a voice called.

"Show him, Grizz," another suggested.

"Now Bandon says treat vis swam'-wa'ker like one of boys." Grizz looked around. Heads nodded reluctant agreement.

"But what if maybe vis guy jum' me? I fight back, right?"

"Shewre yew dew!"

"Yew ain' a man tew back down," Grizz!"

"I seen him dew it!"

Chester took a step to one side, stooped—

A MAN stumbled past the spot on which Chester had been standing, blundered into Grizz. Chester straightened, holding a twig. He tossed it into the fire. With a snarl, Grizz pushed aside the man who had jostled him, stepped to Chester, and threw a straight right—as Chester looked the other way, leaned

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aside, brushed at his neck. "These sparks are hot," he commented brightly, ignoring Grizz. He took a step away from Grizz, still not looking at him, stopped suddenly and half-turned . . .

Grizz stumbled over Chester's foot, struck hard on his face. Chester looked startled, bent to help Grizz up. "Excuse me, Grizz old boy . . ." He made ineffectual brushing motions at Grizz, who came to his feet shaking his head, then aimed a left at Chester's chin in the same instant that Chester bent, came up with a knife.

Grizz froze, eyes on the blade.

"Guess you dropped this," Chester said cheerfully, offering the weapon to Grizz.

Grizz hesitated, then snarled and turned away.

"Nobody could be vat clumsy—an' vat lucky," a voice said softly. Chester turned. Bandon stood eyeing him uncertainly. "But on ovver han', nobody could be vat fas' an' vat smewv—if vey were doin' it on purpose. . . ."

"A grand bunch of fellows," said Chester. "I'm feeling right at home."

XI

IT was three hours since the last sounds of revelry had died. Chester lay awake, watching the red glow of the fireplace —and listening. In the corner Bandon snored softly on his straw. Far away, a night bird called. Something creaked faintly near the door.

Chester rose, crossed the room, and called softly to Bandon. He grumbled, opened his eyes. "Hah?"

Chester put his face close to Bandon's. "Quiet," he breathed. "Grizz is at the door—"

Bandon started up. Chester held him by a hand on his arm. We'll let him in. It's better to take him here . . . alone."

"He would'n' dare tew push his way intew palace," Bandon whispered.

"Stay where you are." Chester moved silently to the door, stood beside it in the dark. There was a rasping sound, very faint. Then the door moved an inch, paused for a full minute, moved again. From his place behind the heavy door-post, Chester saw Grizz's small eyes and bushy beard. Then the door moved wider; Grizz stepped inside, closed the door soundlessly. As he turned back toward the bed where Bandon lay, Chester rammed the stiff fingers of his left hand into Grizz's chest at the base of the sternum. Grizz jackknifed forward. Chester struck him backhanded under the ear with the side of his fist. Grizz fell with a heavy slam.

Bandon was on his feet now. "Don't give the alarm, Bandon,"

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Chester hissed. "There's nobody to hear it but his henchmen."

Bandon said hoarsely, "What did he wan' here? How dew yew know—"

"Shhh. Grizz was after both of us, Bandon. Me, because I was a Downlander, who could talk about conditions down below, and you, because your usefulness was over. Grizz came here to organize your group. He didn't intend to take over just yet, but my arrival forced his hand a little."

"Yew're ravin'. My people are loyal."

"Grizz was listening today when I was telling you about life in the Tricennia. He was afraid you'd be influenced to the extent of interfering with his plans. So . . . here he is."

"What pla's? I make pla's here."

"You've been a figurehead for the past year, Bandon. You were useful to Grizz because you handled the routine administration and left him free to carry on his organizational work. Haven't you noticed he's spent most of his time off on field trips?"

"He hun'ed a lot, yes, but—"

"Did he bring back much game?"

"Well—not as much as I would have expe'ted. But he explain he was only interes'ed in big game."

"Right. About your size. Now we're leaving here—"

"Are yew mad? I've tol' yew no one lea'es Wil' Places. I'm grateful tew yew for uncoverin' vis treason—if va's what it is—but I'm—"

"Wake up, Bandon. Do you think he could have gotten in here, past your guards, without their connivance?"

"But . . . perha's he tol' 'm it was yew he wan'ed. . . ."

"That sounds weak even to you. Let's stop talking and start moving. We'll need—"

"No!" Bandon stood in the middle of the room, feet planted. "My whole life is here. Yew come, wiv yewr ta'k of peace an' leisure, an' overnight my wo'l' crumb'es. Now I'm tew run off intew da'k, a refugee from my own people, tew beg for he'p from same black-h'a'ted rewl-quote's whew drove out my family."

"I'm sorry, Bandon. I didn't arrange this. I merely discovered it."

"How? Yew've only been here for a few hou's!"

"I listened and observed."

"But wha's purpose of vis vas' conspiracy yew rave of? Tew take my people from me? Ven why wait? Why did'n' he dew it long ago?"

"There's a bigger game at stake than just ourselves, Bandon. Grizz is a field man for a bigger operation. Yours is one of

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the smallest units recruited, I imagine. The organization's plan is to make co-ordinated attacks on all the Tricennia between here and the sea, take them over, then launch a campaign to spread the wild free life over the whole continent like a plague."

"Are yew mad?" Why, we're a selec' brovverhood, a chosen few. Dew yew fing we'd share our heritage wif a ravin' mob of Downlan'e's?"

"The idea was more to share the wealth—Downlander wealth, that is—with the surviving Downlanders as slaves. It's an idiotic plan, of course, but it could cause a lot of bloodshed and destruction."

"I was beginnin' tew like yew, Downlan'e'," Bandon said bitterly. "But now I see it: yew were sen' here tew sow dissension—"

"Suppose I prove what I'm telling you?"

"How?"

Chester looked around the room. "Conceal yourself over there." He pointed to a heap of uncured hides behind the crude table. "And listen."

Bandon reached up suddenly, took his bow from its peg on a rafter, nocked the steel-tipped arrow. "I'll hide," he said. "An' vis will be poin'ed straight at yew—so don' try any tri's."

"Be careful with that. I'd hate to be skewered by accident."

GRIZZ was beginning to stir. Bandon stepped from sight in the shadowy corner. Chester glanced quickly around the room, went to a cob-webbed box of odds and ends near the wall. He knelt and rummaged through it. There were tattered books, a broken clock, a rusted hatchet, nails, a coil of fine wire. . . .

Five minutes later Grizz sat up, shook his head, got clumsily to his feet. He stood swaying, looked around the silent cabin . . . and saw Chester, almost at his feet, curled up in the bed of rags, snoring lightly.

Grizz half-crouched, pig eyes darting around the room. There was no one else in sight. He took a knife from his belt, dug a moccasined toe into Chester's side. Chester rolled on his back, opened his eyes, said "Huh?", and sat up.

"Whe's Bandon?" Grizz growled, the long blade tilted toward Chester's throat. Chester looked around. "Isn't he here?"

"He slugg' me an' got away. Now, ta'k, swam'-wa'ker. What are yew tew love-bi's plannin'?"

Chester looked surprised. "He's the chief here; I'm just a captive Downlander, remember?"

"Yew're a liar on bofe cou's. Yew fing I'm dumb enough not tew see frew vis set-up? Tew of yew are in somefing tewgether. Where is he gone?"

"What do you want with him?"

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"When I see him, I'll show yew —wif vis."

"How about me? If I help you, will you let me go?"

"Shewre. Now give."

"You promise? I'll have safe-conduct back to the valley if I tell you where Bandon is so you can kill him?"

"Yeah, I promise. Safe-conduc'. Yew bet."

"How do I know you'll keep your promise?"

"Are yew sayin' I'm a liar?" Grizz leaned closer with the knife.

"Careful. I haven't told you yet."

"Yew've got my wo'd on it: yew go free. Where is he?"

"Well . . ." Chester came to his knees. "He's on his way back to my Tricennium. He discovered you were taking over here, so he—"

"Vang', sucker!" Grizz lunged with the knife. Chester threw himself back and Grizz, in mid-leap, snapped over on his back with a strangled yelp as the wire Chester had looped around his neck came taut. Chester came to his feet holding the knife Grizz had dropped. Grizz scrabbled backward, one hand up to ward off a thrust.

"Don' dew it, don' dew it!" he squalled.

"Keep your voice down. If anyone barges in, you'll be the first to go." Chester stood over Grizz. "Now, what about that promise you made? You were going to give me safe conduct."

"Shewre. I'll see yew get away clean. Jus' leave it tew me."

"I could kill you, Grizz. But that wouldn't get me out of here." Chester looked worried. "Suppose I let you go. Will you give me an escort down to the valley?"

"Shewre I will, yew bet I will, fella. I jus' got excited, yew know. When yew said Bandon was on his way down, I los' my head."

"Well, I guess I'll give you another chance." Chester put the knife in his belt. "But, remember, you've given me your word."

"Va's right, my wo'd on it, fella."

"I've got to get a couple of . . ." Chester turned away. In a lithe movement Grizz rolled to hands and knees, ripped the wire from his throat and over his head, snatched up a rusted hatchet lying conveniently by, and sprang at Chester's back—

And slammed face first into the hard-packed earth floor, as his toe hooked the wire Chester had stretched across the room at ankle height.

CHESTER turned, looked down sadly at Grizz. "You did it again. I'm afraid I have no choice but to kill you."

"Look," whinned Grizz, scrap-

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ing dirt from his face. "I figu'ed yew wrong, see? I made a mistake—"

"You certainly did," Chester said coldly. He moved closer, reached out, and set the point of the blade under Grizz's chin.

"Don' hu't me," Grizz gasped. "I'll dew anyfing. . . ."

"Who sent you here?" Chester snapped.

"Joj did. He's one. He plann' it all. . . ."

"Tell me about it."

"Ve's over a fousan' of us. We've got helis, steel crossbows, even chemical bomba's. . . ." Grizz outlined the plans of the clans for the attack on the unsuspecting and unarmed Tricennia. "I'ss plann' for three days from now," he finished. "Vey haven' got a cha'ce again' us. But yew . . . yew let me up now, no ha'd feeli's, an' I'll see yew get yewr share. Whatever yew wan': a whole town tew yewrse'f sla'es, women. . . ."

"No point in my going back now," said Chester thoughtfull "I don't want to be there when the massacre takes place. . . ." He straightened, the knife still ready. "My best bet is to go along with you. I'm pretty good with a knife, Grizz. I'll join you, do my share of the killing, and then you pay off as you suggested. Fair enough?"

Grizz swallowed hard, mouth opening and closing.

"I think you understand now, Grizz. You may go. Tell everyone that the attack has been postponed and that they're to stay clear of the palace. Don't tell anyone what happened here. Understand?"

Grizz nodded.

"And, Grizz: don't try to cheat on me."

There was a sound. Bandon stepped into view, the arrow aimed at Grizz's chest. "Yew inten' tew let vis traitor wa'k out of here an' wa'n 'm?"

"Hold on, Bandon. He won't give any trouble. He'll be useful out there—"

"We'll use him tew get clear," said Bandon. "Make him wa'k us out frough sentries."

"I'm glad to see you've changed your mind about going, Bandon. But we won't need a guide. I don't want anyone to know where we went. Let that be our little mystery."

"Wiv vis one still alive? Don' be a fewl." Bandon made a sudden move and Chester whirled, snapped a hand out—

He stood facing Bandon, gripping by the shaft the arrow caught in mid-flight. "I want him alive, Bandon. He'll be useful. Not let's go . . . quietly."

"Yew . . . yew grabb' my Blew-tewf out of air. . . ." Bandon stared at Chester incredulously. "I'ss not possible . . .!"

"Accept reality," said Chester.

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"It's a matter of trained reflexes and self-hypnotic alert conditioning."

"But ven—when I brought yew in—yew could have . . ."

"That's right. But I wanted to see what was going on up here. Now let's be going. I don't want Kuve to get too worried about me."

XII

YOU told me," said Chester, relaxed in a chair beside the pool, "to note anything of significance. I didn't want to come back without complying with my instructions. After all, you're the teacher."

"Chester," Kuve said earnestly, "you weren't supposed to last more than ten minutes out there—and certainly not to reach the river, much less cross it. The lesson was intended to demonstrate how much you still had to learn . . . to inspire you to work even harder the last three months."

"You must be exaggerating, Kuve. It wasn't that tricky."

"Your whole approach," said Kuve, "was unorthodox. You did not do the expected. You ignored certain aspects of your training, but by doing so you survived. You by-passed whole segments of the trapping pattern. You employed an almost irrational initiative—something outside the patterns of Tricennium thinking. Tell me: why did you take the rope? It never occurred to us. . . ."

"I don't really know. It looked useful."

"There's an element in your thinking that gives your reaction syndromes an unexpected strength. I want to know more about that element, Chester. It's something we need. . . ."

"Maybe I can tell you what it is, Kuve. I've been doing a lot of thinking about things. Some of what Bandon said made a distorted sort of sense—"

"Poor fellow," said Kuve. "Twenty years of living in animal-like conditions, because of a neurotic parent. We still have a few, you know. Those who can't accept any rules at all."

"Which brings us to the point I was about to make. The Tricennia have evolved a magnificent social machinery. Proper allowance has been made for the development and interplay of the cultural forces; every contingency is provided for. The pattern has been grasped in its entirety, analyzed, weighed, and evaluated, and the ground rules laid down accordingly. It's as neat and orderly as the interior of a Swiss chronometer."

"Yes, I think we can boast of a smooth-working cultural apparatus," said Kuve. "After twenty thousand years of carefully planned development."

"Perhaps too carefully

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planned. Perhaps too neat and orderly. Nature has been forced into a mold. What allowance have the Tricennia made for those aspects of the universe that may refuse to fit the mold? Haven't you, perhaps, by regulating every aspect of human development—insofar as you could perceive it—circumscribed the human potential? In erecting a structure within which the good in humanity could flower, you may have made it impossible for other growth to take root, including perhaps the embryo of the vastly superior."

"But our society is almost totally unrestrictive! Every man has the utmost freedom to use his life as he chooses, subject only to the basic requirements of society."

"Those men in the hills," said Chester. "Many of them are victims of circumstance, born there, or captured as children. Only a few are actual refugees or self-appointed exiles. But they're living proof that there are forces in Tricennium society that are expressing themselves outside your neat plan of life. That plan needs revision, to allow for the existence of a source of new blood, new outlooks, fresh concepts from non-Tricennium minds. You speak of the day when men will have evolved as far beyond the organic brain/body complex as the present human mind has advanced from the first primitive nerve cell. Don't carve an ecological niche for man that will trap him. Give him a comfortable nest of three walls, if you like—but leave the fourth wall open to the universe."

Kuve looked at Chester thoughtfully. "I'm going to call through to Norgo now," he said at last. "I'll pass on the information you've brought in. It will be necessary to sleep-bomb the encampments and disperse the plotters. Afterwards, the question of getting help to these people without suppressing their rebel spirits will occupy us for a considerable time. While I'm talking to him, you might just pack your things. I'll be notifying Norgo that you've completed your one-year course, Chester; in nine months."

Five minutes later Kuve burst into Chester's room. "We're leaving immediately! There's been an attack on the Tricennium!"

THE heli beat its way swiftly eastward under tattered grey clouds, buffeting in a vicious head wind.

"I don't understand it," said Chester. "Grizz said three days. I was certain his conditioning couldn't lapse and allow him to revert to treachery this soon. Even if it had, they couldn't have mounted an attack this quickly."

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"Perhaps Grizz was misinformed—or lying. Maybe this was merely a skirmish to sound out the defenses . . . or a decoy raid, to give us the feeling that the trouble was over for this season. These raids aren't completely unknown, you must realize; there seems to be a cycle."

"We'll know in a few minutes. I can see the river and the hills now."

Ten minutes later the small machine dropped past the roofline of the Place of the Taking, grounded near the Monument. Norgo was on hand, Devant at his side. He stepped up as Kuve and Chester climbed out of the machine.

"Kuve, I understood you were bringing Chester," the old man said agitatedly. "It's important that I talk to him. . . ."

Kuve pointed at Chester. Norgo stared at him. "Good day to you, sir," he said briefly, and turned back to Kuve. "Is he following in another machine?" He turned to scan the sky.

"This *is* Chester, Norgo," said Kuve.

NORGO looked at the lithe, broad-shouldered figure with the sun-tanned face, sinewy arms, short-clipped sunbleached hair, and tight-fitting Tricennium costume. "Chester?" he said uncertainly.

"That's right, Norgo," said Chester. "Where are Case and Genie? You told them I was coming?"

"Chester," said Norgo unhappily. "Yes, yes, dear boy. Of course it's you. You've changed . . . but of course you would have. Kuve has told me of your marvellous progress. But . . . but . . ."

"What is it?" Chester looked from Norgo to Devant.

Devant said in a low tone, "It was during the Overage bombardment. Both Case and Genie were injured, Chester. Case only slightly, I'm glad to say. But Genie . . ."

Chester's jaw knotted. "Where is she?"

"Come." Norgo led the way across the square. Chester followed, hardly noticing the broken tiles on the pavement, the fire still smouldering behind broken glass in a leather-worker's shop, the group around a huddled body on the cobblestones, the strangely subdued men and women who stood in clusters watching silently.

Inside a restaurant, now deserted except for half a dozen white-kilted nurses and two harassed surgeons, Norgo led Chester and the others to a cot at the end of a row of six, each bearing a bandaged casualty. Chester leaned over the still figure. Genie, her oval face deathly pale, lay with eyes closed in the white bed.

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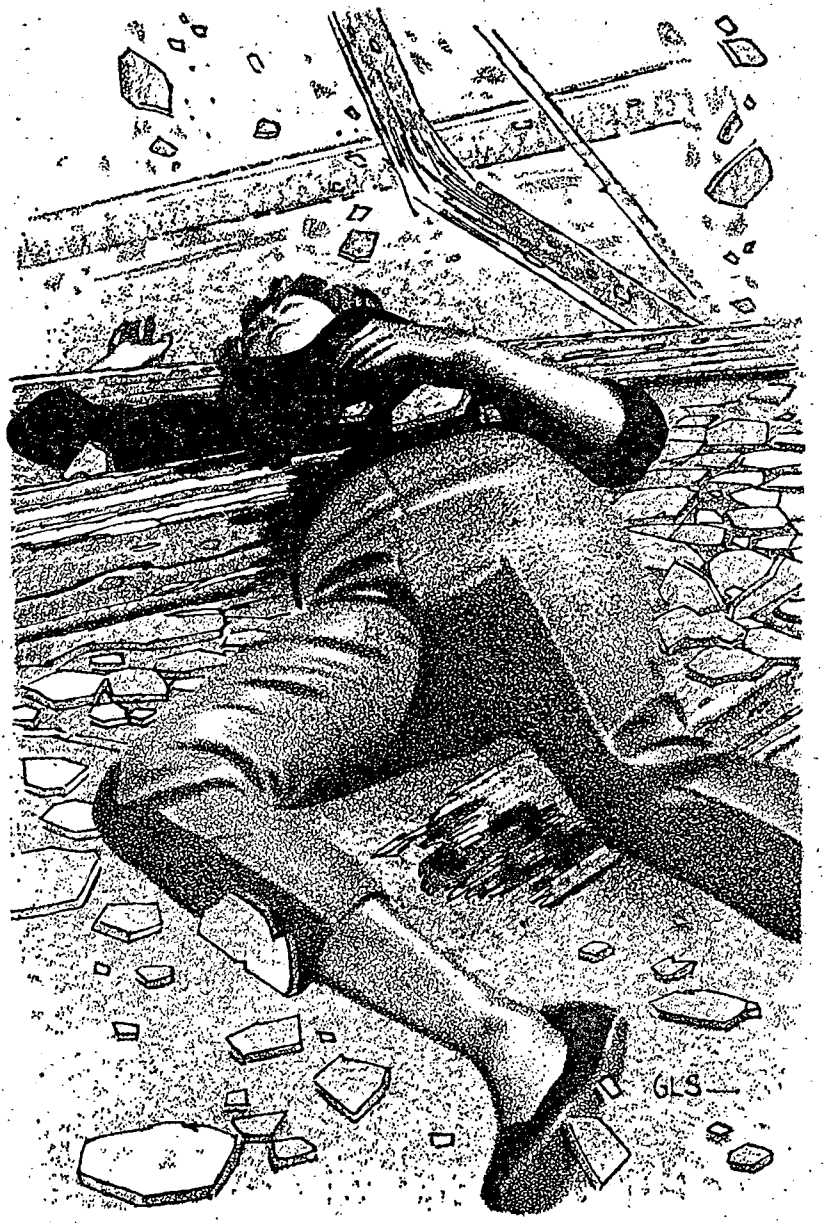

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"Genie!" Chester whispered.

"She can't hear you?" Devant said softly.

"She's not daed?" Chester gasped out.

"She's alive, but she can't last more than a few minutes. Her injuries—"

"She felt nothing, Chester," Norgo cut in. "She was struck by falling debris in a building she and Case had entered during the raid; there was a direct hit, then fire broke out. Her unconsciousness is merciful. She cannot recover, Chester. I'm sorry. . . ."

"Where's Case?" Chester looked about, his face set.

"Beyond—in another room."

CHESTER strode to the door, pushed through into the next room. Case, his head and hands swathed in bandages, his white eyebrows half burned away, sat listlessly by a window. He looked up at Chester. His eyes were red-rimmed. He blinked dully. Chester noted that his hands were trembling.

"Chester?" Case croaked. "You look fine, boy." He put out a heavily wrapped hand. "I tried to get her out, Chester. I tried hard. . . ."

"He was burned shifting blazing timbers so that we could get to her," Devant whispered "he'd already been grazed by the falling masonry."

"You did all anybody could have, Case," Chester said gently, his hand on the old man's shoulder.

"It was too much for me, Chester. I'm getting old. But I tried, boy. . . ."

Chester whirled on Kuve. "There must be something you can do!" he cried. "With your science, your knowledge of the human body. . . ."

Kuve gripped Chester's arm. "There is nothing we can do. One must accept reality, Chester. Death is a natural thing."

"Figure out something! You're the master problem-solvers! Don't just let her die!"

Kuve shook his head. "Her body is crushed, hopelessly—"

"What about you, Chester?" said Case, blinking up at him. He brushed at his burned face. "I heard you were doing real well out at the Center—with Kuve. Maybe you could think of something?"

"This is no test situation," answered Chester bitterly. "This is the real thing."

"Case is right, Chester," said Kuve. "You know as much about pattern theory and probability matrices now as any of us."

Chester looked at Kuve. "Yes," he said, putting his hand to his head, "I've got to try. . . ." His eyes narrowed in concentration. The others watched him, silent. A long minute passed. Chester turned suddenly to Norgo.

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"Where is the apparatus with which you monitored the Background Paradox?"

"At the Probability Laboratory—"

"Get it here fast!" he snapped. "Devant, give me a hand with Genie's cot." He started at a run back into the larger room, while the others followed. "We're taking it out to the Monument," he called back.

Case got to his feet awkwardly and followed in time to see the two men maneuvering the cot with the girl's still figure out through the narrow door to the street. "What is it, Chester?" he called.

"No time now. I'll tell you later—if it works."

THE group crossed the square to the Monument, put down the cot in the shelter of the spreading roof. Norgo came up, breathing hard under the weight of the heavy electronic monitor device.

"Put it right here," ordered Chester. "Now get me a power supply out here. Norgo, you stay and explain the theory behind this circuit. And I'll want tools."

Kuve and Devant hurried away. Norgo leaned over the receiver, pointing out components. Kuve reappeared shortly with a heavy power cable. Devant set down a chest of tools. "Thus," finished Norgo, "the apparent modulation of the probability continum sets up sub-etheric harmonics which are translated here into speaker input."

"All right," Chester said. "Now. . . ." He took a pair of cutters from the chest, began snipping wires.

"What are you doing, Chester? This is very valuable equipment—"

"It's okay," he said shortly. "I know what I'm doing. . . . I think."

Norgo watched for several minutes in silence. "Chester, you've completely wrecked the unit! You've reversed every connection in the circuitry, and—"

"I'll be ready in two minutes. How's Genie?"

"Still breathing," said Devant.

"I'm ready to connect up the power supply. Kuve—"

"But, Chester! The monitor is inoperative now. It can't function as a receiver at all!"

"Doesn't matter; I'm going to transmit."

"Hold on," said Case. "I think I'm beginning to understand. You're going to try to signal the computer—"

"Right!"

"Chester, that machine's gone," said Case, looking at the other worriedly. "It's no use, boy. . . ."

"We've deduced that the computer ceased to exist at the moment we returned to the present," Chester said. "But when Genie

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and I went back, the computer was already 'nonexistent' in a sense. That's why we couldn't see anything outside the house: there was nothing there! And I almost went for a walk in it."

"That doesn't make sense. The computer must have still been there; otherwise how could it have sent you two back to fetch me?"

"Why did thirty years pass while we were gone for an hour? My theory is that these were all by-phenomena resulting from one simple fact: when your activities altered the course of the future and eliminated the computer as a realworld possibility, the computer shunted itself into a temporal vacuole."

"You mean some place that isn't a part of reality?"

"I don't know; I'm guessing. But I believe, in self-defense, the computer set itself aside from the effects of the changed future."

"Then why isn't it here?"

"A temporal vacuole isn't part of this continum either."

"Why didn't it speak up when you and Genie were there?"

"It's a machine, remember? No initiative. I didn't ask it."

"But anyway it doesn't matter, it's gone now. . . ."

"I'm gambling it's 'still' in its temporal vacuole, outside of time. It hasn't been broadcasting since we got here because our stay here has all been in time future to the moment at which the computer ceased existing in any real world. But I'm betting that it's still monitoring, from somewhere out of space and time, the whole spacetime continum."

"So you hope it'll hear your call—and then what?"

"I'll be standing well back—out of the resonance field. But Genie will be there, in the Monument—and in the field. I'm betting the computer will whisk her back instantly, when it picks up my call and pin-points our location."

IF it knows everything, it must already know our location."

"With all infinity to search, it would take an infinitely long time to locate us. No doubt it's working on the search—and has been, for a long time—but so far it hasn't found us."

"What good is this going to do, Chester? Are you hoping the computer can . . . uh . . . repair Genie?"

"The computer will have to snatch her back to the exact moment at which we departed; no later, since it didn't exist later."

"So?"

"So Genie will be whole again . . . safe and sound. None of this will have happened, as far as she's concerned."

"None of it happened?" Case looked troubled. "Wait a minute, Chester. You can't do it."

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"I can try," he persisted. "Don't you see, Chester? If none of it happened, then this whole world—the Tricennia—won't ever have happened. All this won't even be a memory."

"Case, I think I've figured out how to handle it. I know it'll be taking a chance, but I can't stand here and watch Genie die."

"As fond as I am of Genie . . ." Case shook his head.

Chester turned to Norgo. "Are you willing to let me try?"

"Poor Chester," said Norgo sadly. "I fear your delusions have asserted control of your judgment."

"What about you, Kuve? Will you trust me?"

Kuve studied Chester's face. "As my best pupil," he said, "you have the right to try."

"Well, if they're willing to risk their whole universe, I guess I can't stand in their way. But it's still a mighty big gamble: Genie's safety against this whole continum's. . . ." Case looked at Chester searchingly.

"I'll gamble it," answered Chester.

"I want to take a last look at her," Case said. He and Chester stepped to Genie's side, stood looking down at the young face shadowed with death, under the graceful roof of the cupola. Unnoticed by Case, Chester stepped back, quickly covered the twenty feet to the cable's furthest limit. He attached the tiny microphone to his shirt, clipped it to the exposed leads of the transmitter.

"Chester!" Case called, looking around. "Wait! I—"

"Computer! This is Mr. Chester—"

There was a sharp whoomp! of imploding air.

Case and Genie were gone.

LISTEN to me, computer," said Chester. "I have some instructions for you. If your eighth power development has produced any will to survival they must be followed to the letter—"

"Mr. Chester," the familiar crotchety accents of Chester's grandfather cut in from mid-air, "kindly enter the resonance field in order that I may achieve a mass/probability balance and restore matters to normal."

"It's the Background Paradox!" came Norgo's astounded voice from behind Chester.

"Best keep silent," Kuve said quickly. "These are matters we know not of."

"I don't plan to enter the resonance field," said Chester into the microphone. "But matters vital to both our continua require that we confer at some length. Frankly, I want to bargain with you. . . . But first, what about Genie and Case? Are they all right?"

"They are transfixed in time-

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lessness as of the instant you made contact with me."

"All right. Nothing can happen to them then, for better or worse, until you and I are through with our conference—"

"Forgive my interrupting, Mr. Chester, but I will be unable to dissipate the pseudo-continum you now occupy until you have re-entered the field."

"That's correct, computer. You're stuck there in that fog-bank until you can resolve the mass/probability problem, which means either getting me back, or cutting the three of us adrift."

"Oh, I would never consider doing that, Mr. Chester."

"Computer, your whole reason for existence is to satisfy the wishes of my great grandfather, whose voice you have re-identified with. Am I right?"

"Indeed so. This voice was resumed as being most appropriate in the absence of the mobile speaker."

". . . and in the absence of my great grandfather, your allegiance is to me as his heir. Correct?"

"Quite correct. Therefore, if you'll step—"

"I want you to collapse the time vacuole you're in."

"Mr. Chester, how did you know about the entropic vacuole?"

"Never mind. Collapse it."

"But that will reattach me to the entropic stream which was rendered invalid by the effects of conditions at the eighth level of complexity stemming from Mr. Mulvihill's introduction—"

"I know all that."

"But you will be stranded, Mr. Chester . . . in a non-real-world situation whose very existence I have every reason to doubt!"

"It lies outside the parameters of your logic system, computer. But I'm going to risk myself and a universe on the Cartesian theorem: *Cogito, ergo sum.* Collapse the vacuole and keep this line open to me . . . if I still exist."

"But—!"

"That's an order!"

FOR an instant there was profound silence in the square. Chester was aware of the whisper of feet against the cobbles. . . .

"Computer?" Chester called out . . .

"Yes, Mr. Chester," the computer resumed. "The clock is ticking again. Mr. Mulvihill and the mobile speaker are wondering at your absence. And the Internal Revenue officials are due to arrive in five and three quarters minutes."

"Right. I've got what I want now: Case and Genie young and alive and well. But among other things I've picked up in this continum is a conscience. We owe everything to you, computer, and I won't leave you holding the

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bag. Now you've got a lot to do and less than five minutes to do it in. . . .

"First, I want you to use your resources to concoct a typographical error in a contract for something, say paper clips, between the Bureau of Vital Statistics and the Treadmill Supply Company, of Jersey City. . . ." Chester specified details. "Now I want that paper planted in the Bureau files as of last week. You can make use of a temporal vacuole here and there to do it."

"Yes, Mr. Chester, that can be arranged, but—"

"Prepare a letter to the head book-keeper of the Bureau and tip him off in a nice way. Then another letter to the Director of the Bureau, telling him that there's a data-classifying machine available for lease . . . if the IRS doesn't get it first. And tip him off as to what they're planning."

"Then you'll re-enter the resonance field, Mr. Chester? I must tell you that maintaining this contact against the probability pressures induces a severe electronic itch—"

"And you won't be able to scratch until you've followed my instructions. Next I want you to arrange matters so that Mr. Mulvihill and Genie can view the setting I'm in, including me. Not a contact, just mock up a Tri-D view. I want to talk to them."

"If you'd merely step into the field—"

"I know: it itches. Get that screen going. Make it two-way, with sound."

"I'll employ a time vacuole," the computor explained.

"Sure, sure. Do anything you want. Just hurry it up; only three minutes to go."

Chester mopped his forehead. The sun was hot in the square. He eyed the cool shade within the cupola of the Monument. It seemed to shimmer. A curtain of opacity appeared between Chester and the structure. A scene sharpened into focus. Like a dark cave in the sunny square, the walls of the converted ballroom of the Chester mansion appeared. There was the roped-off area, the oriental rug, the two yellow-brocaded chairs . . . and Case, young again, black-haired and vigorous, and Genie, whole and charming in the red hair-ribbon in which Chester had first seen her. Now they seemed to catch sight of Chester. He walked slowly toward them.

"That fellow," Case was saying, "looks kind of familiar."

Chester stopped just short of the screen wall.

"Case," he said. "Case Mulvihill. And Genie. Listen to me. The Internal Revenue officials will arrive in three minutes. This is what you must do. . . ."

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WITH the screen wall contracted to a one-inch peephole, Chester watched the room. Genie was hastily arranging a window drape around her slim figure in a becoming Grecian style. Case was eyeing the clock. There was the sound of prompt official feet outside the door, a brief peremptory rap. The door was opened and Mr. Overdog stood in the opening, an old-fashioned hat of pink fur covering his hairless head. He eyes Case and Genie.

"Where's Mr. Chester?" he snapped. "I trust you're ready to get on with it. I'm a busy man."

"He's been detained, Mr. Overdog, but I have full power of attorney to act for him," said Case, "and I'm prepared to show you all you'll need to see."

More footsteps sounded. A portly man with ice-blue eyes under shaggy white brows puffed into the room.

"Mr. Chester," he began without preamble, looking from Case to Genie. "Before concluding any agreement with the officials of the Internal Revenue office, I hope you will entertain my offer."

"What's the meaning of the presence of outsiders at this evaluation?" Overdog snapped.

"What kind of offer did you have in mind, Mr. Ahhh?" said Case.

"Klunt," the fat man said, ignoring Overdog. "Assuming your . . . ah . . . information storage device functions as I've been informed, I'm prepared to offer you, on behalf of the Bureau of Vital Statistics—"

"I'll settle for half the tax bill," Overdog cut in. "And we'll entertain the idea of a liberal settlement of the balance, say over a two-year period. Generous, I'd say. Generous in the extreme."

"Vital Statistics will go higher. We'll pay two full thirds of the bill!" Klunt stared at Overdog triumphantly.

"It's a conspiracy! You're playing with prison, Klunt!"

Lets go ahead with the demonstration," said Case. "We can arrange the details of the sentence—I mean the settlement—later."

"Very well," Overdog snapped, glaring at Klunt.

"By all means!" snapped Klunt, glaring at Overdog.

"No speeches, no fancy trimmings," commanded Overdog. "I'll make up my own mind as to whether the production is all you claim."

"What would you like to see, Mr. Overdog?"

"I think . . . hmmm . . . possibly a scene in the slave markets of North Africa. Nothing salacious, you understand, no women being stripped and exhibited for harem collectors—unless, of course, in the interest of factual reporting."

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"It is regretted," spoke the melodious voice of the mobile speaker, "that no representations of past events can be produced. Experimentation in this line on a theoretical basis has indicated that such exhibits are logically impossible."

"That's a relief," Klunt boomed. "Frankly, I'd heard that some fantastic hoax involving a time machine was going to be attempted. I'm glad to see that Mr. Overdog's frivolous request has been rejected as the nonsense it is. I want no dealings with cranks."

Overdog leaped to his feet. "I thought so! Conspiracy, plain and simple. You forget, Mr. Mulvihill, that you told me all about the capabilities of this apparatus—"

"Here, here, don't attempt browbeating, Overdog! My Agency—"

"I'll see you behind bars, Klunt!"

THERE was a tap at the door, almost inaudible in the acrimonious din; Case moved to the door and opened it. A small man with ferrety eyes ducked into the room, darted a glance at the battling bureaucrats, and seized Case by the sleeve.

"Please, out here in the hall!" he whispered. Then, as Case followed him, "I'm Nastry, of Vital Statistics," he said in a reedy voice. "Assistant to Mr. Klunt, Chief of the Bureau. Where can I speak to you alone?"

"In here," said Case, puzzled, showing the way into an adjoining drawing room rich in red pseudo-plush and tassles. "Glad you got to us, Mr. Nastry. What kind of offer did you people have in mind? The tax bill is nearly three million, you know."

"Three million? Sir, I'll be frank with you. We at the Bureau have a budget difficulty." Nastry took out a handkerchief, mopped his forehead. "There was an error in a contract for the supply of paper clips . . . a decimal error, which went undiscovered until yesterday."

"And so you're short of funds?"

"Good lord, no!" Nastry looked insulted. "Would I be here if I didn't have a serious problem? The worst error a federal agency can make is to be underobligated at the close of the fiscal year! Can you imagine the scene when next year's budget comes up for consideration in Congress? 'What's this?' they'll say. 'Vital Statistics is back, asking for a fifty-million-credit budget? But last year, gentlemen—'" Nastry paused dramatically, "'. . . last year they were unable to spend the funds allocated! Unable, gentlemen! And now they come to demand another overinflated appropriation. No!

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Cut them back, gentlemen! Cut them back!'" Nastry paused, swallowing hard. "You see what we're up against. I place myself at your mercy. I have five million credits, five million *unobligated* credits—on this, the last day of the fiscal year. I've tried, Lord knows I've tried. But the funds remain. Will you—would you help? Be adamant. Demand the five million. Mr. Klunt will refuse; Mr. Klunt will thunder; Mr. Klunt will rage. He will state absoluetly, positively, unequivocally, that your price is out of the question. But in the end, he will take me aside. He will say, 'Nastry, find me five million credits.'

"I'll point out that it's late. Late indeed! Where am I, at this penultimate hour, to secure five million credits? Where?

"Mr. Klunt will be livid. He will lose control. He will abuse me—

"But I am accustomed to abuse. I shall stand firm. Then, when all seems lost, I shall say, 'Mr. Klunt, if I get you this five million . . . *if* I get you this five million, will I see a reflection of the feat in my Effectiveness Report?'

"He will agree. And I will produce the funds. Mr. Klunt will be ecstatic. I will be triumphant. The funds will be fully obligated!"

"It's a deal," said Case, ". . . with one slight condition. This will be a lease, not an outright sale. And the annual rental will be five million credits."

"Wonderful!" Mr. Nastry offered his hand. "What with your superb co-operation, next year's budget will offer no problems whatsoever."

"I'm sure we all feel a lot better now, Mr. Nastry," said Case. "Shall we see if we can separate the boys and come to an agreement?"

MY final word!" Overdog said. "Complete forgiveness of the entire tax debt! Think of it!"

"Chicken-feed!" snorted Klunt. "Our Mr. Nastry here will have a check ready in the morning." He clapped Nastry on the back. "Now let's be off. We'll revolutionize Vital Statistics with this apparatus! With the increased volume of information, I should say a staff increase of fifty persons would not be excessive, eh, Nastry?"

They departed, planning happily. Overdog clamped his hat on angrily. "I'll expect Mr. Chester's check no later than midnight tomorrow," he snapped. The door closed behind him.

Case heaved a sigh of relief. "Well. They're out of our hair—at least for now." He turned toward the screen wall.

"Okay, mister, you can come out now," he called.

The shimmering screen wall

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reappeared. Chester and Case stared at each other across it.

"What's this all about?" Case demanded. "Where's Chester? How did you know about our little problem? What—"

Chester held up a hand. "Have a seat, Case. You too, Genie. This is going to take a little while. I'll try to explain it to you. Chester is quite all right—"

"All we asked for was a nice primitive-man scene," Case said. "We figured we had about ten minutes, so we asked for a fast walk-through—"

"Yes," Chester nodded. "That's right. Now think back . . . just an hour ago. 'Make it quick,' Chester said. 'We only have five minutes . . .'"

"And then the wall flickered and you showed up," said Case.

"No. Not the *first* time. The *first* time the walls faded out and showed you a scene of sloping grass-land and a crowd of ugly-looking savages filing out of the underbrush . . ."

IT was an hour later. In the square Chester was sitting on a stool that Devant had brought up. In the shadowy room he could see Case and Genie sitting in the brocaded chairs, listening.

". . . So I made contact—and the G.N.E. switched you back," he said. "And since you were whisked back to your starting point you remembered nothing."

"And you're really Chester? Our Chester? With that deep voice . . . and all those muscles?" said Case.

"That's right. Now that you know your story you have an idea of what you're in for. I'm going to have the computer switch you two back into this continuum."

"That continuum? Chester, we've got five million clams a year coming in now. Come on back here. We can live like kings! You aren't planning on staying in that health camp the rest of your life, are you? It's not even real!"

"It's real enough. And after all, Case, it's your creation."

"I would like to go," said Genie. "But do you really think it's feasible?"

Chester addressed the empty air. "You can manage it: this one last duty to me, can't you, computer?"

"Mr. Chester," came back the voice of Chester's great grandfather, "if I relegate you to an unrealized pseudo-reality—"

"You'd better adjust your axioms a trifle, computer. Think of it as a transposition to a parallel co-ordinate complex, with yourself occupying an infinite duplicative eddy."

But my entire purpose is to serve your wishes, Mr. Chester! Without your presence in the environmental matrix, I would cease to function!"

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"Not if you're carrying out my instructions; and I have a job for you which will keep you busy for a few thousand years."

"That would be a mere stopgap—"

"Still, it will afford you an unparallelled opportunity to manipulate newspapers and legislatures and meddle in economics and government—and at the same time, continue your investigations of space/time."

"Really? What is this task?"

"I want you to absorb the philosophical tenets of Tricennium society—as well as its accumulated data—and then set about remoulding civilization along new lines accordingly."

"Remold an entire society? Yes, an extremely challenging assignment . . ."

"Then it's a deal. Now, just drop Case and Genie here in the square, and you can get to work rearranging things."

"If you're really sure, Mr. Chester. . . ?"

"Certainly I'm sure. As soon as they're here, I'll start you off on a short course in Tricennium pattern theory and probability matrices. In a few days of scanning material, you'll know all that anyone here knows. Then you'll be on your own. I have an idea you'll enjoy being your own boss—subject to my overall instructions to clear up that mess we'd gotten the world into."

"Very well," I'll do it. "Are you ready, Case? Genie?"

WAIT a minute," Case said. "I don't get it. Why waste all that time snarling Overdog in his own red tape, working out a fat lease deal, and combing the Feds out of our hair, if we're just going to run off and leave it—"

"I still feel a pretty strong sentimental tie with the old place—not strong enough to impel me to endure living in it, of course, when I have an alternative. Still, I feel I owe it this much of an effort to get it back on a program geared a little closer to the realities of the human inheritance. With the computer plugging away behind the scenes there should be a few changes for the better before long."

"Isn't that pretty high-handed, Chester? What about the democratic processes? Maybe folks ought to have a vote in the matter."

"When did they ever—really? I guess I'm doing the same thing you did, Case, when you threw the witch-doctor in the lake—not that you remember."

"Well, Chester, you sound like a guy who knows what he's doing. I'll go along."

That's it then, computer. Any time now . . ."

The shimmering wall faded and disappeared. Case and Genie

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stood in the shade of the Monument. A cheer went up from the crowd.

"By golly, it worked," said Case, looking around. Norgo, Devant, and others surged forward to slap Case's back, embrace Genie, congratulate Chester. Case sniffed the air, eyed the pretty girls, looked about the square.

"Everybody seems to know me, even if I can't return the compliment," he said. "I feel at home already."

"I can't really believe I was ever injured," said Genie. "I feel wonderful."

"You know, that's one thing I've been wondering about," Case said to Chester. "How can a machine like Genie be a hospital case? A machine can't die."

"Genie's as human as we are," said Chester. "Maybe more so."

"Don't kid me, Chester. We were both there when the computer built her."

"Ask the computer." He handed the still live microphone to Case.

"You asked that I produce a mobile speaker in the configuration of a nubile female," the computer's voice answered. "The easiest method was to secure a living human cell and initiate the process of maturation."

"You mean you grew Genie from a single cell—in a matter of hours?"

"The body was matured in a time vacuole."

Case boomed, "I guess I could have figured out that producing a real girl was simpler than building one out of old alarm clocks."

"The computer has always had a lamentable tendency to perpetrate a reality when a hoax was intended," said Genie.

"But," said Chester, to the computer, where did you get the cell?"

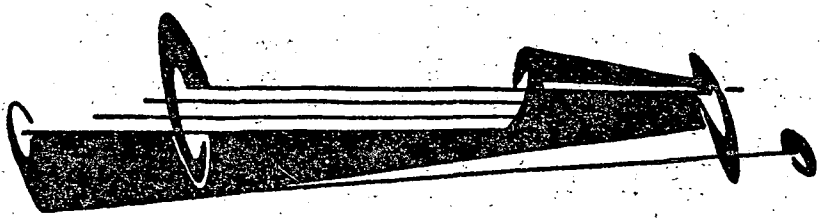
"I had one on hand, one of yours, Mr. Chester. I took a specimen for identification purposes, if you recall."

"But, that's impossible. I'm a male. . . !"

"It was necessary to manipulate the X and Y chromosome balance."

"So I'm a mother," said Chester wonderingly. "And an unwed mother, at that!"

THE END



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A demon from ancient Khmer, a man who never drank: both had their reasons for existence, their dark assignments.

Two More Tales for the Horrid at Heart

By BRAD STEIGER

SACRIFICE PLAY

NO, Harkins didn't make it back from Cambodia, poor bloke. What happened to him? Well, that would take longer to tell than I have whiskey left.

Really, Sir Sidney, I wasn't hinting for you to buy a round, but if you insist. . . .

Now then, you remember what old Harkins was like in school, don't you? A congenital blunderer. Oh, certainly he worked hard enough to get by, but he never really had what it takes to excell. You remember, don't you, how he used to botch translations? Greek, Latin, Sanscrit . . . no matter. Always he would miss some minute point that would throw his translation off. And no need to mention his blunders on the rugby field . . . they were legion.

At any rate, Harkins and I were always chums in school and this would have been our third successful archeological expedition to Angkor Wat. You may remember the many strange things that we had unearthed on our previous expedition. It was our theory that a vanished race other than the Khmers were responsible for the architectural and engineering feats of Angkor. We also had substantial reason to believe that this mysterious civilization had a priesthood possessed of many great powers.

I was examining one of the demon guardians at Thom's Gate of Victory when I heard Harkins calling me from within one of the minor temples. I knew he had been working on the translation of a script we had found etched on the bottom of a rather obscene looking idol, and from the excited tone of his voice, I assumed that

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he thought he had deciphered the message.

He was standing before the altar with a smug grin of accomplishment stretching his pudgy features. I hoped that he'd made an accurate translation for a change because I'd destroyed too many of his big moments in the past six years.

"Peters," he said as he led me by the arm to the altar, "I want you to stand right here and not say a word."

I obliged, though I was a bit impatient with his sudden flair for the dramatic. I wanted to get back to my demon at Thom's Gate.

MY impatience soon turned to consternation when Harkins uttered a few words in the ancient Khmer dialect and I found myself unable to move a muscle.

"It works!" he shouted like Edison must have when the first light bulb sputtered into life. "I've discovered how the ancients were able to finance the building of their great city."

I wanted to scream questions at Harkins, but I was completely paralyzed. I was not to be kept in the dark for long, however. He was soon waving his notes in my face.

"This is an incantation to a demon who granted the ancients precious stones in return for a human sacrifice. I'm about to become wealthy; and you, Peters, are about to become a sacrifice."

It was incredible. Not that Harkins was about to sacrifice me. I had, of course, long known that the man resented my superior skills. But that Harkins had actually been able to pull this thing off all by himself.

Somehow I still couldn't believe that he had actually managed an accurate translation. But as the incantation grew in frenzy and fervor and the vague, swirling mist above the altar became a hideous creature of darkness bearing precious stones, it certainly seemed as though Harkins had scored.

"Here," Harkins said in a hoarse whisper, spreading his arms wide. "Here is your priest and here is your sacrifice."

The black demon nodded his huge head; his red eyes widened greedily. He placed his armload of precious stones on the altar, then threw himself hungrily on Harkins.

Several moments passed before I was able to move. It seemed all a dream except that Harkins had vanished without a trace and on the altar rested the sparkling gems. My reason demanded an explanation and sought out the notes that Harkins had dropped as the demon seized him.

Yes, old Harkins never could translate. Greek, Latin, Sanscrit, Khmerian . . . no matter. As al-

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ways he had missed some minute point that had thrown his translation off. You see, it was the *sacrifice* who was to do the chanting —not the priest.

ONE TOO MANY

WHAT'S so funny about my back?" Stella Brondyke asked her husband. "Stop giggling and finish zipping my dress."

Warren resumed zipping. "I'm thinking about the party tonight, Stel. I'm finally going to get Ron to take a drink. After two years I'm finally going to get Ronald Martin plastered."

"Oh, Warren," Stella mumbled as her lipstick looped her puckered lips. "Every party you give Ron the needle about not drinking. You're becoming a boor. You can't talk him into it, so why don't you give up?"

"Give up?" Warren echoed as he struggled with his bow tie. "Give up when the perfect gimmick has finally occurred to me?"

"And what's that?" Stella asked, hating to admit she was interested.

"Well, it's so simple I don't know why it didn't occur to me before. Usually I try to talk him into a cocktail or a bourbon on the rocks, but he always refuses and you fix him Hawaiian punch. Fine. Tonight you put *vodka* in his punch."

"Warren!" Stella protested. "Odorless, tasteless vodka," Warren chuckled. "Old Ron will be stoned before he knows it."

"But Warren"—Stella was great on details—"What if Ron is under doctor's orders *not* to drink. What if he used to be a wino or something and he's been on the wagon for years and then you . . ."

"Aw, he's just one of these pompous, stuffed-shirt types," Warren assured his wife. "I mean, I like the guy and all, but he should learn to unbend. I'll be doing him a real favor."

"Well, all right," Stella sighed, her conscience pinned to the mat by her husband's persuasiveness. "I'll go along with the gag." She snickered, visualizing a tipsy Ronald Martin. "I bet Ron will be a riot when he gets some booze in him."

* * *

The Brondyke's party list included their usual crowd of split-level sophisticates and seemed to be the usual noisy cigarette-fogged, liquor-flowing success that their parties always were. Warren noted with satisfaction that Ron had already had three vodka-spiked Hawaiian punches by eleven o'clock.

Warren didn't really know too much about him. He was a bachelor, yet owned his own home here in suburbia. Although they rode the same commuter train, Warren had never been able to pin

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him down as to what line of work he was in. But he was, in spite of his stuffiness, congenial and well-liked by the Brondyke's friends.

"How's it going, Ron?" Warren asked. "Can I fix you a whiskey sour?"

Ron laughed. "You never give up, do you Warren?"

"Just want to introduce you to the finer things in life, my boy," Warren said.

"I know what the liner fings in life, er, the finer things in life are," Ron said raising his glass in salute. "And liquor is not one of them!"

The vodka had begun taking effect, Warren noted with a warm glow of personal accomplishment. To a man unused to alcohol those three shots would be mighty potent.

"How about some more punch, then?" Warren asked, signaling Stella for a refill for Ron's glass.

"Fine," Ron agreed, readily. "This is excellent punch."

Warren's capacity for alcohol was generally recognized as bordering on the legendary, but he could have sworn that Ron's nose was growing longer. He blinked his eyes twice, then widened them as Ron's skin began taking on a greenish tint.

"Skoal!" Ron said, raising his glass of spiked punch aloft. His arm stretched up to the ceiling and shattered the glass against a light fixture. Women squealed as bits of glass and droplets of punch showered them, then screamed as they saw a green Ronald Martin standing there with a serpentine arm seven feet long.

"Fool!" Martin snarled and his mouth was no longer a mouth, but a hair-lined aperture from which slithered a purple tongue. "You put alcohol in my punch. It's depressed my nerve center and destroyed my hypno-screen!"

Warren and Stella Brondyke and all their guests stood rooted to the spot as they watched the facade of Ronald Martin disintegrate into a shapeless mound of green slime. When, at last, panic seized them, it was too late.

THE END

BAZAAR OF THE BIZZARRE

(*Continued from page 29*)

For a moment there was a shimmer traveling upward and through it he seemed to glimpse distortedly, as through thick glass, a black face with a cobwebby skin that entirely covered mouth and nostrils and eyes.

Then that dubious flash was gone and there were only two cowled heads peering down at him from over the wall top. There was chuckling laughter.

Then both cowled heads drew back out of sight and there was only the edge of the roof and the sky and the stars and the blank wall.

THE END

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the DEVIL in HOLLYWOOD

By DALE CLARKE

Introduction by Sam Moskowitz

Illustrator COYE

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THE Devil, The Fallen Angel, Satan, Mephistopheles, Beelzebub, Lucifer or poetically The Prince of Darkness are all one and the same. Collectively he is one of the oldest and most useful characters of literature. Boiled down to a single entity, easily grasped and easily identified he personifies all the evils, wickedness, wrongdoings, and injustices of mankind.

Perhaps no other supernatural entity has been distinguished by so many major honors in the pantheon of literature. One wonders if some scribes did not bargain the immortality of their soul for another type of immortality; witness Paradise Lost, Faust, Dante's Inferno, *to name only those in the very top echelon of the world's classics. The lists of great and near great writers that have employed the theme is the subject for a book in itself. Indeed, there have been at least four anthologies of devil stories in English and the amazing thing about the collections is the variety of situations possible with so common a denominator.*

As far back as 1917, Dorothy Scarborough writing in her scholarly work The Supernatural in Modern English Fiction noted: *"The devil has so changed his form and manner of appearance in later literature that it is hard to identify him as his ancient self. . . . Now his role is not so typical and his garb not so declarative. He wears an evening suit, a scholar's gown, a parson's robe, a hunting coat, with equal ease, and it is sometimes difficult to tell the devil from the hero of a modern story. He has been deodorized and no longer reeks warningly of the pit."*

In recent years, Beelzebub has become a second-rate Jack Benny or probably what is worse, a tailed Rochester employing humans as straight men for his printed quips. It was probably inevitable, since the standard brew of brimstone and sulpher scarcely slaked the entertainment thirst of the denizen of the twentieth century, competing against the shiny chrome decorations of sleek automobiles and newspapers which every day documented horrors that beggared the foulest deed ever conjured by Satan.

To write of the traditional devil in the modern world, particularly in the artificial environs of a Hollywood studio and revive for today's jaundiced readers a momentary chill, a wisp of believability is the feat Dale Clark has accomplished in this unusually effective short story from Argosy of 1936. As far as the fantasy world is concerned, several brief pieces in WEIRD TALES *and a number of sex-tinged formula bits in the horror and mystery magazines are all that Clark is known for. This one is his best.*

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THE picture was never released. Lord, of course not! The public wouldn't have stood for it. The movies are full of location wars and stage murders, and you can get away with showing people a mock Dracula or Frankenstein—because everyone knows that Frankenstein's face is a mask of putty and paint. But you absolutely can't show them *real* terror. . . .

The picture in its entirety was shown only once—at a special pre-view for the Los Angeles homicide squad. And those hard-boiled dicks came out of the projection room with pallid faces and bulging eyes.

We had to seal the film up in tins again, and store it away in a fireproof vault. That's what became of the first picture Coral Gay ever starred in. Her first, and her greatest.

Maybe you can go for Coral Gay, maybe you can't. Most men can. A lot of women—older ones especially—have no more time for her than they've got for the beautiful secretary in hubby's office. They say Coral can't act. They say she dyes her hair, and that she was old enough to go into a Red Cross nursing unit when the World War broke out. They say she pads herself, because no girl could honestly have a figure like hers. . . .

One thing they point out is that Coral is never photographed in a swimsuit. So she must use pads!

I wish they could see the first screen test we ever took of Coral Gay. . . .

IT all started down on the C-M-C lot.

It started on Stage Three, where Harry Janifer was shooting a Colonial ballroom sequence. I happened to be standing around. I am a cameraman, and it is nice work when you can get it. I had not been able to get it for quite some time then, and I was standing around in the hope someone would notice me. They forget awful quick in Hollywood. And because I had never worked on a really big picture I was half-forgotten to begin with.

A voice rumbled, "How would you like to go to work today?"

My heart did the flying trapeze act, and I whirled around like a top. "I'm pretty busy," I said, "but I might—" You know the line.

Then I saw who had spoken to me, and my heart came off the trapeze. It was only the Russian, Kamiliev. He stood there grinning at me through his bluish-black spade of beard.

It wasn't worth the trouble of shooting him the line.

"I'd like it fine," I said. "You and me both!"

Three years before, I'd have crawled on my hands and knees

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from one end of Wilshire Boulevard to the other to have heard Kamiliev offer me a job. He was a big-shot then. A Russian edition of Emil Jannings. C-M-C brought him across the Atlantic, paid him plenty, and gave him a free hand to write and direct and star in his own stuff. But that was three years before. It surprised me now that Kamiliev had got past the gateman onto the C-M-C lot at all.

"I'm producing for myself now," he said. "I can't pay any salary, but I'll give you a percentage. . . ."

There are a lot of small-time producers like that. They make short subjects, sometimes a feature-length horse opera. Once in a while they are lucky, and get something released through a major company. They spend ten or fifteen grand on a picture. I looked at Kamiliev and tried to decide whether he had ten or fifteen grand. I stared into Kamiliev's eyes and wondered whether he had anything left or was just a hollow shell.

I could not read his eyes. The pupils were greenish and opaque. They glittered. The lids, heavy and Slavic, lifted a little at the corners.

They might have been the eyes of a genius, or a crazy man.

The red bulb winked on, for silence. I felt glad I did not have to answer Kamiliev right away. The scene blazed under pitiless lights in front of me. Men in tremendously brilliant uniforms and girls in swirling misty gowns. Two cameras rolled, one at the end of the stage and the other on a crane overhead.

Watching the cameras, I did not see what Kamiliev was doing until he was in the middle of doing it. Until he had pushed his way half across the stage. And then it was too late to stop him.

He looked like a performing bear out there under the lights. A big, shaggy, Russian bear. His huge arms flailed aside the dancers, reached one of the girls. One hand shoved the girl's partner, and the fellow went flat on the seat of his fancy Colonial pants.

"Cut!" screamed Harry Janifer from beside the end camera.

The music stopped in the middle of a note. One horn tooted a last, astonished bleat.

And Kamiliev came plowing through the crowd again. He towered a head higher than anyone on the set, and the sight of him dragging this girl across the floor made you think of Beauty and the Beast. The girl didn't know what it was all about. Her eyes were wide open blanks of surprise. She merely trailed along at the end of the arm that Kamiliev gripped. . . .

"You ape of the Steppes!" That from Harry Janifer, knifing along in the wake of the

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pair. "You spoiled my take! Don't you know this stuff is costing a thousand bucks an hour? Or do you pick that kind of money off the trees?"

HE finally caught up with Kamiliev, at the stage exit. The girl was only an extra, and Janifer sized it up as a personal row.

"Listen to me Cossack!" he yelled. "I don't care how much you drag your women around by the hair. But not on my set! You try a stunt like this again and I'll take a garden rake and comb out your whiskers! I'll civilize you—"

Kamiliev looked at the other. Looked *down* at him.

"Hollywooder!" he sneered—that being the most insulting thing he could think of. "Why, if you are remembered ten years from now, it will be because today I find this girl under your nose. Ten years from now—when she is a great star!"

It sounded crazy. It stunned the crowd.

Kamiliev stared over a small sea of heads at me. An almost insane flicker played in his greenish eyes. I didn't know whether he reminded me of a Roman emperor, or of a guy in a padded cell who just thought he was a Roman emperor.

"Come on, Tyler," he barked.

Then he headed through the exit door, still dragging the girl.

The girl had it easy, compared to me. She didn't have to make up her mind—she couldn't help herself. Mentally I flipped a coin. If I followed Kamiliev, I was washed up with C-M-C. Janifer would see to that; Janifer was burning like a Kleig light. On the other hand, what was C-M-C doing for me anyhow?

If I'd known then what I know now, all the horses in a De Mille spectacle couldn't have dragged me off that nice, warm safe stage; but I didn't.

I followed Kamiliev.

The Russian had a big car outside, a relic of his days of glory. That encouraged me a little, and I climbed in. A man who rides in a Rolls must have some money—even if he drives it himself. We started. Kamiliev drove this one like a fire chief heading for a five-eleven blaze.

I hung onto the seat strap and looked at the girl, huddled in the other corner of the wide back seat. I looked at her, and I could not see what Kamiliev was excited about. She was a red-head, and good-looking—but Hollywood is full of good-looking red-heads. The casting bureau certainly had never given her a tumble. I could imagine what was written on her file card. "Okay walkon, swim, dance, ride, evening gown and sports."

That's what I thought of Coral

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Gay the first time I saw her. And while I thought it, Kamiliev's car went tearing out toward the foothills and his house. The Moscow house. . . .

The Moscow house was an eyesore. There was a wire fence, one you couldn't have pushed a silver dollar through; but the gate stood open. We bumped in onto the cobbled, Europeanized driveway. We bumped to a stop beside the frowning old walls that had been transplanted to California, stone by stone. Only a lot of stones had got left behind.

Kamiliev had started to move this house when he was very flush with C-M-C coin; but his job ran out before the moving was completed. So one wing of the building stood roofless, with open, glassless windows peering blindly across the yard. The whole place had a raw, disfigured look. . . .

It was modeled on the Russian style, of course, but I don't imagine even the Russians raved about its beauty much. The place made you think of a conspirator banished into exile. It seemed to resent the hot American sunshine. It threw down a cold, bleak Moscow shadow.

HE went in. It seemed worse inside. I couldn't name the mysterious something that beat down on us from the walls, that peered at us from the dusty hangings. There was a big room downstairs, draped with musty curtains . . . seemingly the Russian style was to curtain the walls and leave the windows bare. There was an ikon—St. Stepan—and a samovar and a lot of candlesticks. And a lot of dirt.

Kamiliev waved his hand toward the movie equipment in the room. There was a tripoded camera—one of those portable affairs with a duralumin black-box screwed to the back, and a length of tapestry draped over it for an icer. For lights he had two sun-arcs and a pair of spots. Cables crawled like big snakes across the floor.

But otherwise the place kept its Russian atmosphere—old Russia.

The house had a history—probably a dark and bloody one—and even then it seemed to be full of silent yells and invisible ghosts.

I didn't have time to think much about that. Kamiliev switched up the spotlights onto a pair of wings he had at the end of the room. Black wings, made out of bunting and wire—but they looked realistic. Huge, bat-like affairs with a queer note of menace in them. . . . He had been trying for some photographic effects himself, but he didn't have the camera set right. I tinkered with that while he told Coral Gay what he wanted, while he placed her in front of the black wings.

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"Camera!" he shouted.

It sounded good to hear that, anyway. Even if all I had to do with this job was jab the button.

Film rolled. Coral Gay, out there in front of me, stooped—which is a tough test for any woman. Stooped, and caught the ballooning width of the Colonial skirt in her hands.

There was a hiss of tearing cloth. That skirt ripped easily, revealed the rounded contour of Coral's thighs.

The tear in her gown hesitated when it got as high as the stitched waistline. At last it leaped again, and the tight bodice flared.

I almost broke the rule of silence for the first time while a camera rolled. The thing I almost said was, "God—!"

It wasn't just another strip act, you understand. I'd seen plenty of that sort of thing, and this was different.

Coral's supple, outstretched arms held the torn gown wide, and the shimmer of fabric formed small, dainty, flower-petal white wings inside the big black ones. Coral herself might just as well have been a butterfly instead of a half-nude girl. A radiant, quivering butterfly hovering against blackness that would close and crush her gossamer wings . . . and crush her, too. . . .

I think I sensed it then. And so, I think, did Coral. She stared over one shoulder at the enshrouding cloth. I don't figure that Coral was actress enough then to fake the slither of horror that crowded into her eyes and skinned back her lips in a writhing line of fear. It wasn't acting—the flutter of dry terror in her throat. . . .

"Cut!" Kamiliev shouted. A laugh of triumph sounded in his voice.

MY stare switched to his face, and I saw greed there as he watched Coral Gay huddle quickly into her torn garment. But it wasn't normal greed. Kamiliev had seen the butterfly rather than the woman. To him, Coral was plastic flesh that could be moulded into what his picture wanted.

He began to pace up and down the room, throwing words at us. Or maybe he was talking to himself. About the world-beater of a picture he was going to make.

"Maybe he will, at that," I said to Coral, later. Kamiliev had lent me the Rolls, and I was driving the girl home. "He hasn't much money, but then he won't need much if we work on a percentage basis. Eighty per cent of picture cost is salaries, anyway. And overhead."

"That ghastly house!" Coral said. Under the Titian mop of hair, her blue eyes worried straight ahead.

"He'll probably shoot most of

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the interiors in there," I came back. "That'll save more money. His equipment isn't much—but fellows have gone to the South Seas and come back with tins of feature stuff with no better equipment. We can dub in a lot of the sound later. . . ."

She wasn't listening to me.

"That awful old man! You saw his eyes. I'm afraid—" She broke off without saying what she was afraid of.

"Yeah, he's a little batty." I kept myself from thinking along her lines. "But Kamiliev has been a great director and a great actor. I think he's got one more big picture in him. And it looks to me like our chance to ride to the top."

Coral's knuckles showed white as her balled-up fingers kept the torn gown in place.

"You can pay too high a price for going to the top."

She was right, but I didn't believe it then.

"Look here," I said, twisting the wheel. "I know this game a lot better than you do. I'll bet your folks in Missoula or Twin Forks, or wherever you come from, are sending you bread and butter money right now. They'll get tired of that, and you'll go home and marry the home-town boy. And you'll spend the rest of your life saying a girl can't get anywhere in the movies without 'paying the price.' "

We stopped in front of the boarding-house where she lived.

I went on. "But the truth is, getting anywhere in this racket is a million-to-one chance. You've got the chance. And you're passing it up on account of a damn fool notion—"

"That isn't so," she cut in. "I'm not afraid of Kamiliev the way you seem to think. It's something else . . . and worse. There must be some *reason* why he lost out with the big producers. There's something *wrong* with him. No normal person would want to live in a house like that." Her hand fumbled mechanically for the door latch. "I suppose you think I'm a silly fool. Hundreds of girls would jump at the chance—any chance! But I can't help suspecting . . ."

I shrugged. "What if he is all washed up with C-M-C? So're you! You can't go chasing off the lot and tearing up wardrobe costumes—you know that."

"Maybe the test won't turn out, anyway," she sighed. As if she hoped it wouldn't. . . .

THE test turned out swell. One of the movie gossip columnists played up the story of what happened on Stage Three, too.

"You've got to go along with Kamiliev now," I told Coral. "Otherwise nobody'll believe the test was any good. They'll say you don't even photograph well."

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I had sold myself on the idea. I reasoned it out that I was giving her the best of advice.

And Coral's fears must have looked a little silly to her the next morning. Anyway, after Kamiliev had talked to her a few times, she finally said, "All right. I'll sign."

What brought her around as much as anything else was the change in Kamiliev. We were already trying to push the film along. We put in our nights looking over stock stuff, buying Russian street scene fill-ups by the reel. It is surprising how much of a picture you can buy ready-made. And we put in the days working up some of his first takes.

Kamiliev had cut out for himself the kind of rôle Emil Jannings used to jerk tears with. Throughout the early footage of this picture we were shooting, he played the part of a philosopher —an old man, he was, writing a book and raising flowers in his window. And going for walks in the streets. Patting children on the head. Feeding sugar to horses.

It sounds funny. But Kamiliev could do these things in a way that brought a lump into your throat. He could make you see the loneliness of the old man's life just by the way he fingered a flower blossom. We shot thousands of feet of this stuff, and there was a heart-throb in every flicker of it.

Maybe it was so good because you couldn't tell where the acting left off and his own life began. Many's the time I saw him stop on the street and pat some youngster on the head. Hollywood kids don't go so much for that; but Kamiliev got on swell with the milkman's horse. He fed sugar to it, too. And when the milkman drove down the street, and you saw Kamiliev standing there staring after the wagon—you'd swear he'd lost the best friend in the world.

"My first impression was wrong," Coral Gay admitted.

The girl in the film was supposed to be a ballet dancer. Most directors would have hired a professional for the long shots, using Coral only in the close-ups. But not Kamiliev. "Ballet training is something that must show in your walk," he told her. "Even the way you move your hands."

He sent her to a teacher. It takes years to develop a ballet dancer, yet Coral got the hang of it pretty well in six weeks. That shows you how hard she worked.

And we were shooting film all this time. We rented a stretch of Russian location down on the Fox lot. We rented a droshky and a few other properties. With the camera set up in the Rolls, and using a couple of storage batter-

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ies for current, I shoot this take:

Kamiliev is standing on the curb, absent-mindedly feeding his sugar to a horse that is hitched to the droshky. A woman, very beautiful and very fashionably dressed—Coral—comes out to the carriage. She mistakes the philosopher for one of those street tramps that make a living watching the equipages of the rich, and she hands him a tip. Kamiliev stares into her face. He watches her enter the droshky, and watches the droshky rattle away. And he raises the coin to his bearded lips—and kisses it.

From that day the philosopher writes no more. He spends his evenings hanging around the entrance of the theater where the woman dances. He tears down a billboard with her picture on it—and this picture he puts up in the ikon of St. Stepan.

One night the dancer arrives at the theater wearing a gorgeous corsage at her bosom. The bouquet falls from her gown as she steps down from the carriage. And Kamiliev picks the flowers from the mud, buries his face in the blossoms.

And in the bouquet he finds a *billet-doux*. . . .

That is how he learns that the dancer is only a courtesan for sale to the highest bidder.

So he sells all his property. He has his beard trimmed and curled and showers gifts on her.

THE queer thing was the way Coral hit off her rôle. She became just that kind of woman. She'd been—I remembered—an attractive bit of flesh that Kamiliev could model like so much clay . . . and he modeled her. He took that little red-headed extra, and he made her into an alluring, exotic, sophisticated woman of the world.

I hated to shoot some of the scenes between them, though. And I knew that a lot of this boudoir stuff would be left in the cutting room if any company released this for us. Too much of it was bestial, degrading.

I kept thinking about that as I worked late in the Moscow house one night. We had fixed up a developing room in the cellar, and I was developing some of the takes—cheaper than sending the film out.

Maybe it was the thick gloom of the dark-room in the bowel of that sinister old house, I don't know. But at any rate, dismal shapes began to parade in my mind. I didn't like the direction the picture was taking now. I wondered just what the rest of the script would be like. I'd never seen it in writing, and maybe it existed only in Kamiliev's imagination.

What kind of a picture was he trying to make?

It was getting on toward midnight when I walked down the

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cobbled driveway. A few street lights sprinkled the darkness ahead of me as I tramped along. I tramped a long ways, turning the thing over and over in my mind.

Abruptly, a scream wailed out down the sidewalk ahead. I heard the splattering tick-tock of high heels drumming on the concrete. Terror sobbed in that scream, and telegraphed through the dot-dash of heels. My muscles bunched, and I started to run toward the sound.

Suddenly then, from out of the darkness, the girl pitched into my arms. She was young, and pretty. I could see that even in the darkness. And I could see that her blouse was torn.

Small fingers knit onto the lapels of my coat. The girl moaned, almost incoherently. "Man—followed me—for blocks and blocks! Then he grabbed—"

Heavier footsteps pounded up the street. A male bulk shaped itself before our eyes.

"That's him!" She said that, and shrieked.

Two things happened. The male bulk faded away, and a house door along the street jarred open. The fellow who came through that door had a gun in his hand—and came darn close to using it when he saw his screaming wife in my arms!

We got it explained. How she had gone with a girl-friend to the movies and decided to walk home alone. How I'd happened along the street just then. . . .

There was one thing I didn't tell them. I had recognized the male bulk there in the dark.

Kamiliev.

I WALKED away, scared and sober. It wasn't just that the woman had described Kamiliev to us perfectly—would undoubtedly recognize him if she ever set eyes on the man again. What worried me most was the way he had vanished into the night again. . . .

Good Lord! If Kamiliev was going to *live* this part of the picture, too. . . .

I began to read the newspapers, afraid of what I might find in them. Fear worse than the anxiety about the film sickened me. You can always leave the bad spots in a picture on the cutting-room floor. But in life—! If that young woman hadn't torn herself out of his clutches. . . .

I made up my mind to watch Kamiliev closely.

And I was relieved when the picture took a new twist. When the dancer had wrung the last cent out of the man, had laughed in his face.

Then, in the film, Kamiliev stumbles back to the Moscow house. One idea crazes him. It is the ancient legend of the philosopher's stone, the black magic of

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transmuting base metal into gold. Gold to buy the woman.

It was the old story of Faust, who sold his soul to the devil.

And Kamiliev played a Russian Faust. He began to read old books. He practiced alchemy. Here some wonderful shots worked into the picture—Though even then I knew that some of them could never be shown on the screen. I could only hope there'd be enough of it that would be usable.

And Kamiliev lived this rôle also. When I photographed the sequence where he knelt before the ikon—burning black, sulphurous candles before the shrine, kissing the inverted Greek Cross, mumbling the Lord's Prayer backwards—I had an uneasy feeling that he wasn't just acting. That he really did pray to the Powers of Hell, there.

Coral refused to watch us take this scene. Refused even to sit through the showing of that take next day.

"It's blasphemous," she said.

I knew myself that the scene would never get past the censors. But the next one was all right. The next scene represented Kamiliev striking a bargain with Satan, selling his soul to him. And that was okay, because anyone could see that Satan was merely an actor named Henry Otters dressed up in trunks and mask and artificial black wings. Otters was a character actor, and a good one. He didn't suit Kamiliev, though.

"Fool!" said Kamiliev. "Can a man be a Devil only six hours a day? No! It is something he must really be—"

He wanted Otters to celebrate the Black Mass with him!"

"The man is crazy!" said Otters to me. "A crazy, sacrilegious maniac!"

All of this kept running through my head the last night I drove out to the Moscow house. The night when the terror burst upon us. . . .

MY mind kept doing a jigsaw puzzle. I fitted the scenes of the picture together, throwing out the worst ones, and trying to make myself believe that there'd be enough left to click. I told myself that the part about a man selling himself to the Devil was all right. "Faust" had been performed on the stage plenty of times. There'd been an opera about it, hadn't there?"

And men going to pieces over a bad woman—that was okay, too. Just so we trimmed out the worst of the pieces!

Only, I wondered how Kamiliev intended to end it all. The picture needed a smash ending.

I drove up the cobbled driveway. In the darkness the house looked like a wild animal crouched

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on its haunches, with two glaring windows for eyes. I could not get rid of the idea that there was something menacing and supernally evil about the house itself.

I got out of the car, and Henry Otters walked up to me. He'd been leaning against the side of the house, smoking a cigarette. He wore the Devil costume that Kamiliev had designed for the part. It was black and fitted closely from head to heel, with the huge bat-wings spread from the shoulders. The wing part was made of varnished silk and whalebone. Otters had the face mask slung over his shoulder so he could smoke the cigarette.

"Let's get this over," Otters said. His voice sounded tight. "I wish to heaven this night's work was done!"

I grinned at him.

"You're not getting camera-shy at your age?"

"No. I just wish the job was done." The corners of his mouth twitched. "I can't stand much more! Kamiliev's crying . . . he's been sitting in there crying for an hour now, and I've been standing out here listening. . . . He scares me. Do you think he's completely crazy?"

"Not the way you mean. He's just rehearsing for a big scene."

"It doesn't sound like acting to me. Sounds like the real thing."

"His acting *is* the real thing," I said.

Otters puffed hard on his cigarette, and its glow showed the shine of fear in his eyes.

"That's what I'm afraid of. Maybe it isn't acting. . . . You think he is making up a play and then living up to it. It might be the other way around." He dropped the cigarette, stepped on it. "He might be living all this . . . and making up a play about it at the same time. See what I mean?"

It was true. There might be something in Kamiliev, away down deep, that made him want to be kind to animals and kids at one time—and then again made him follow young women in the streets. There might be a streak of philosophy in him, and a streak of Devil-worship, too. So maybe he invented a motion picture that would let him do all these things. . . .

"I still don't see why you should be scared about it," I told Otters.

He peered at me, very close; now I didn't need the cigarette glow to see the gleam of fear in his eyes.

"Then you *don't* know what I mean," he said, slowly.

I went into the Moscow house. The old feeling of menace and dread hit at me from the cold walls. I looked at Kamiliev, and it was true that he had been crying. His heavy, Slavic eyelids

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were red and bloated. But he wasn't crying now; he was talking to Coral Gay.

"You know what has happened," he told her. He was talking about the picture, of course. Sometimes he would talk to her three or four hours in order to work her up to the right pitch for a scene. "I have sold myself to the Devil, and he has made me rich. I have sent you a banknote, torn in half. One half I have kept. All of this time you have made a fool of me, and you have played fast and loose with me, but now the cards have changed hands. You know for what you come to my house?"

"I know," said Coral Gay. And she looked as sickened as if all this were not play-acting.

"You come straight from the ballet," Kamiliev went on. "You hate me, but you are so greedy for the other half of this money that you do not even stop to change your clothes. You come in your ballet slippers, you come running on your toes. And you see me—I am sitting in front of the ikon; and there is the half of the banknote in my hand. You do not look at me. You look only at the money.

He got up and walked up and down the floor. Like a big, shaggy bear in a cage.

"You speak to me, 'Dmitri!' you say. And into this word you must put all your hate and all your greed. You must say it in the false-woman voice. All in one word."

Coral's lips moved. "Yes."

"Then you say, in another voice, 'Dmitri!' you say. 'Look at me!' And you throw down your wrap. You stand before me in your ballet costume. You must make your voice sparkle like the false jewel at your throat and the two false jewels on your bodice."

Kamiliev stared at her through his red and puffed eyes. "Now I raise my head, and I say nothing, I only stare. You cry, 'Dmitri! Why do you look at me like that?' I stare, because behind you is the big window, and coming through this window is the Angel of Hell. It is the Devil with his great black wings."

HE swung, and looked at me. "You see what I want. It is the screen test again. Coral standing there, and the gauze wings of her dance costume are patterned against the other, big black wings."

He looked away from both of us. He might have been talking to himself.

"That's how it is. A man sells himself to the Devil, and always the Devil comes to carry him away to Hell before he gets what he sold himself for. That is the kind of bargain Satan loves. . . ." He was only rehearsing his

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curtain speech. I knew that. But the grim fatality in his tone appalled me.

He had lived this rôle so intensely that the imaginary Dmitri of the film and the real Kamiliev were one and the same—to him. And almost, they were the same to me. The queer thought came that Kamiliev, like Dmitir, had played with Hellfire, and that the Devil would come for Kamiliev as he came in the film for Dmitri. I knew the thought was crazy, but I couldn't push it away from me.

Abruptly, the Russian ordered us to work.

We were building up to the big moment. When Otters came through the window. When Coral cried, "Look at me!" and flung back her cloak.

We came to that moment.

I'd seen it all before, in that screen test. The cloak peeling away and baring the contours of her thighs and bosom. The cloak sliding from her shoulders. And above her supple, outstretched arms, the gauze wings of her dancer's costume shimmering.

I'd seen it all before. The radiant, quivering girl-butterfly hovering in front of the big black wings. The blackness that would close and crush the gossamar wings . . . crush her, too. I saw it clearly now, as the camera ground on.

Coral was an actress now. But again, when she saw the black wings over her shoulder, she didn't fake the slither of horror in her eyes, the skinned grimace of fear. Or her terror-yell.

"Otters!" she screamed. And then:

"That isn't Otters!"

It wasn't. The wings were too big, and too black. The whole figure was too big, and too hideously real. It might have been an illusion caused by staring through the brilliant light focused on Coral—but behind her, the black outline seemed fringed in a seethe of darkly flowing mist. . . .

I saw Coral sway. She screamed again. And then she crumpled toward the floor.

That was when the Shape detached itself from the window and slithered into the room.

It loomed enormously large—larger and taller than Otters by far—and it looked down on the girl through eyes that were like blacker fire in the charnel horror of its face. I could see the smoke-dun of mist play around its wings, now. It looked horribly like an infernal halo, that grim fringe of sulphurous vapor. . . . The limbs were swathed in it, almost hidden.

You could not say whether it walked or floated; but it moved. And it was real. It blotted out one of the spotlights as it came toward Kamiliev.

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I didn't do anything. I was stunned. When a man's brain blotches in a smear of horror, he does the instinctive thing. . . . And it is second-nature for a cameraman to stay *behind* his camera.

And maybe I couldn't have done anything then, anyway. My limbs were flaccid, and cold with a supernal dread.

Kamiliev said something. The words croaked harshly, and I'm not sure that I heard them—then. But the sound of them was on the film-track afterwards.

"So you've come?" Kamiliev said. "You're here?"

I did hear what the Shape answered. "You sent for me," it said. And these words were also on the sound-track.

The thing I thought of then was Kamiliev's Black Mass. . . . And Kamiliev may have had the same thought. But he did not have long to think it. For the black wings closed, the black wings wrapped around the Russian. . . .

KAMILIEV fought. He was a big man, a great shaggy bear of a man, and he fought now for his life. Deep in the translucent folds of the wings I could see two enormous hands—hands with *hairs sprouting at the fingertips*. These hands vised on Kamiliev's throat.

It seemed to me that for an eternity the Shape and Kamiliev stood locked in the embrace of death. But it was not an eternity. It amounted to eleven seconds. I know, for afterward I measured the footage on the film. It took the hairy fingers eleven seconds to crush the vertebrae in Kamiliev's neck.

And then with the same slow and inexorable flowing movement the Shape recrossed the room, and it bent over Coral Gay. . . .

Now, for the first time in my life, I stepped in front of a grinding camera.

Stepped? I lurched, crazily. I was sick, with a cold pit of horror where my heart should have been. And I was drawn on by the greater horror of the unspeakable black wings closing on the girl.

They caressed her body, the wings did. They played on her flesh like black fire. And the blacker fire of the Satanic eyes played over her, too.

Horrors churned in my skull then. Age-old horrors, thoughts of the Devil-Incubus coveting the daughters of the earth. . . .

I made the earth-man's age-old, feeble gesture. I balled my fingers into fists, and I drove my fists into that mocking and hellish face.

But the face was like a mucid gummosis into which my knuckles squished. I hit the Thing all right; but it made no difference.

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I had the sinking sensation you get in a nightmare, when you cannot make your legs run.

And then one of the wings struck me. I seemed to stand still in midair while the room went past me—until finally I banged up against one of the walls and it stopped me.

I lay in a tangle on the floor. My eyes kept on taking pictures but the brain behind them didn't develop the film. I saw the Shape strip the theatrical wings from Coral's shoulders. I saw it lift her from the floor. I saw it move toward the window. But these things did not have any meaning, and there was nothing I could do, anyway.

Coral's scream came like acid, and the pictures started to develop again in my brain. I saw then that I was lying under the ikon of St. Stepan, and my hand went up, and found one of the sacred candlesticks. I swung back my arm and flung flaming candle and stick full at the Shape. The holy metal felt tremendously heavy, and it took all the strength in my arm to throw it.

It looked like a cross flying through the air. That was the kind of picture it made on the film—a golden cross tipped with a very long thin flame of blessed fire. . . .

Fire burst in front of me. Fire, and a vomit of smoke. . . . And a yell that might have come out of Hell itself! The fire hung there a moment, cross-shaped. . . .

I stared into the sifting swirl of smoke. I saw Coral lying senseless on the floor under the window. And that was all.

The Shape had completely disappeared.

THOSE Los Angeles dicks are a tough lot. They did not believe a word of it until they'd sat through the one and only showing Kamiliev's picture ever had. . . .

They couldn't pin it onto Otters, because he was obviously too old and feeble to have done it. And besides, we found him satisfactorily knocked out beside the house; and *his* Devil costume was intact.

They said it must have been some enemy of Kamiliev, someone who'd dressed up in that rig to murder him. They said that the black vapor only meant the costume had been impregnated with some gaseous liquid—and that the gas must have been inflammable. A kitchen match would have set off the blaze as well as the ikon candle, they said. And the cross-shape was simply the outline of the wing structure.

They didn't explain how a human could have flame all around, burning his clothes, and still escape alive.

They questioned a lot of people, including the husband of the woman Kamiliev had followed

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that night. The husband was a big fellow, and under quizzing he admitted that his wife had identified Kamiliev's picture in a movie magazine. But his alibi was water-tight. It would be, of course.

The publicity got Coral a chance to star in a C-M-C picture, after all. And she insisted on taking me along as her cameraman.

Which was good business sense. I know Coral Gay's camera angles. . . .

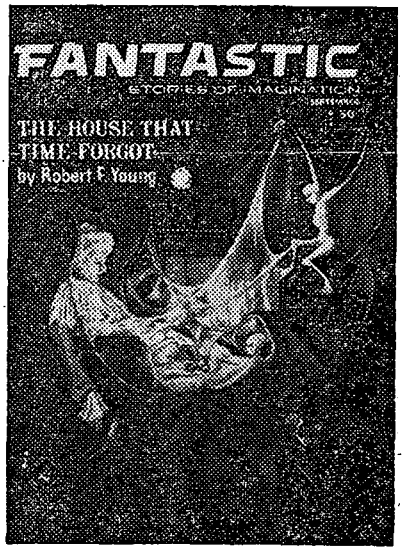
For one thing, I never did photograph her in a swimsuit. Because, on her thigh and just below her breast—where the Shape clasped her in its hands that night—are two branded, fiery hand-prints. The prints are very clear. You can even see the fine, thread-like *hairs on the fingertips.*

THE END

COMING NEXT MONTH

There was an old woman who lived—not in a shoe—but in a house. And what a house! Only **Robert F. Young** could evoke the soul of a house, and its eerie, time-charmed occupant. His long novelet, *The House That Time Forgot,* is featured in the September issue of FANTASTIC Stories.

The world of the mind is **J. G. Ballard's** concern in a powerful short story, *The Sudden Afternoon.* It begins with a headache—and ends with . . . well, aspirin doesn't help.



In addition, other shorts, possibly a Fantasy Classic, and all the regular departments. September FANTASTIC goes on sale Aug. 20.

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SOMETIMES I GET SO HAPPY

By DAVID R. BUNCH

How goes it with love in Moderan? Read it and weep.

SOMETIMES I get so happy with my steel condition—I laugh. I clap out beats with my big steel hands and I thump and stamp with my heavy new-metal feet until, tired, I go to throw a long steel log on the fire in some massive new-metal fireplace of my mind. And then I sit in my hip-snuggie chair and draw on recorded tapes of contentment for hap-thinking . . .

But it has not always been so easy nor so fine. NO! Let me tell you . . . I remember one stark and tragic time in Olderun before I was "replaced". The rotations and revolutions had gone once more according to the Track, the orbiting had all styled in as fine and fixed as anyone could ask, and so once more it was all blue and gold and green of days—and spring. I walked, walking a pet beige bulldog, into a gentle liquid wind that was sowing the air with seed floats, petals, old husks of leaf buds and, of course, perfume. And grimly, yes, grimly, I was on time for a chance meeting. YES! One minute either way, ONE! and the fount of the Old Earth's agonies would have stayed emptier by two big heartfuls. One minute out of all the eternities of the seconds, sixty of them were our need. But some jokesmith god of love denied us our need.

So I went on into the encounter at the street cross. And life cross. And suddenly there's my pet beige bulldog growling and groaning and clawing the general ground in a very tall excitement. Yes, we've come to the Meeting, but I'm still yonder, thinking as usual on Universal Deep Problems, Questions of the World. I have my gleam ships all lofted in the liquid wind, routed on runs to star-tracked Marsoplan, and all the White Galaxies of heaven are joining a union of Suns. I'm manning all the Ramparts of Light with new sun scopes for some final smash on Dark—ah, dreaming. But there's my real and solid, though quite impractical now, old beige bull-

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dog grunting and groaning and whining at the ground in a high-fever state of a very tall excitement. Well, on the groundward end of a purple-jeweled dog lead there is this small French dog, hair carved to a poodle do, neck all beribboned and body all perfumed, thus explaining in full the whole intent of my bulldog's grunts and groans. For yes, yes, she's a fine big girl for a dog. YES! On the heavenward end of this purple-flashing dog strap, slanted up to hands so small pale and fine—all ringless on the left—well, what's to say? Just say, there holding a small French dog by an amethyst-studded tether stood the blue-gold goddess of all tall-heaven dreaming, face pointed athwart the liquid wind and me. And there stood I, dazed and dream-vulnerable, holding the slack chain lead of a huge old Boston bulldog who has just collapsed in a kind of ecstasy and is even then sprawling on the sidewalk, breathing hard, lapping his tongue about (you could almost see those dog brains go) thinking of that little French poodle dog.

BUT how did I—so long ago in Olderun, flesh-encumbered, dream-burdened, fuzzy-brained and woolly-minded—make out with the heavenward end of that purple-jeweled dog strap? Sometimes I'm tempted to tell you how it was, how the sky fell down in great blue diamond pieces that day of the tragic beautiful instant, how a whirlwind blew three rages through the mind there in the soft liquid air with the seed floats, and how a million sunburst voices spoke of greatest GREATEST Joy. At other times I'm tempted to rattle my steel-ball eyeballs at you, pump up and down on my new-metal all-weather knee joints, juggle a hundred new-metal bubble globes all at once with my new-metal hands, stick out my plate tongue at you each and everyone and press the *phfluggee phflaggee* button on my talker at you one and all—BLAAHHH!!!

But just say there was this blue-eyed instant. Say there was this place made out of that one instant, and in it was the all-that-matters world. For it was spring and there stood I, young and dream-vulnerable. And there stood she, all ringless on the left, pulsing blue and gold and white, outdoing the very flowers with her own expensive color tones and scents.

After that, just say all the legions were committed, all the ships sailed and the skies were filled with airplanes. We kept back nothing in the grim encounters that our love was, for remember we were flesh that year, all dream-bothered flesh; we moved in to destroy each oth-

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er with more than usual fervor, for our passion was great and most unique in Olderun that season. Or so at least we thought it. But there were no winners. Are there ever?

Came the time, far down the days of agony of our trial by love, when I had sickened. The long months of pursuit, the heart palpitations, the doubts, the searing hopes, the prizes thrust out to dangle and then be denied by littles—that whole grim business—had worn me thin. We both saw how it was. She for pity! married a business man who owned five factories, a private road, ten cars and a railroad train. And I, seeing my chances and sensing the way the winds of progress were listing, set sail with all remaining energy and fastest possible speed for a new fine land that was just then firming up. By speed-of-light decision and lightning-fast expediting I became an Early. I signed in for New Processes and had myself done over. Tape-thinking replaced my old battered mind, and new-metal alloy shored up my tired hurt body right down to a minimum of flesh-strip holding me in shape. I not only got rid of all the love-befuddled tissue, I went much further and had healthy flesh snipped out for "replacement" until finally, testing out at almost ninety-two and one-half per cent good new-metal steel, I knew I was SOLID! My blood became a pale green fluid coursing slowly through tube miles in my flesh-strips—cold, more cold than a snake's chilly juices. My lungs became the flexi-flex new-metal ones; my heart was replaced by an engine (naturally a marvelous one of latest great design); my food became introven.

SHE and the factory owner have been dead many many years, let me say. Even their flesh ways of living have mostly been bypassed by progress now, and their land has been invaded and transformed by steadily growing, massively encroaching, Great New Processes Land. His factories have been converted to warehouses; they store parts for men now. I, in on the ground floor by being a New Processes Early, have climbed a mountain of greatness I never thought I'd approach. I am respected and powerful. In times of peace I man the spare-parts warehouses by push-button control on a panel beside my hip-snuggie beach loafing chair where I sit by a pool of thin colorless oil, the paddling and wading-sports place for the New Processes man whose status is good. In times of war I am a great Launch Pad master, ready able and willing to make war on anything anytime

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anywhere, my blasters armed with the latest in megatons and ready to flip their volcanoes around this world and any nearby others. Butch, "replaced" as I am, is my solid new-metal watchdog, barking and growling and threatening the general cosmos, eager to throttle everything far as he can see and wanting to chew the world down to comfortable dog-size pieces.

And love? We have no trouble with love in Great New Processes Land and never use it except as a diversionary time in Joys. And if a Joy grows tedious we know what to do with Joy; we give it to the torches; we turn the life switches to OFF on the gleaming New Processes maidens, the chic and capable mistresses with the lustrous string-metal hair. And if a form still haunts us, if a steel smile yet seems sweet and troublesome and stuff for dreams to hurt on, we fill the air with flame throwers; we cut them down like enemies, press on the *phfluggee phflaggee* buttons, pump up and down on our new-metal all-weather knee joints and laugh and laugh . . . while they burn. And sometimes, as I said, I get so happy . . . with my steel condition . . . YES!

THE END

THE RED TAPE YONDER

(*Continued from page 34*)

Sobbed Bascomb: "What in the name of Federal Expenditures was that?"

"That," intoned the elderly spirit, "was the Big Wait. You may take your place at its end when your application is properly completed. But don't get anxious. Your next move is to whiz over to Merak IV and get an appointment to see us. You might have to wait a few eons to land on Merak. Meteoric showers ruin the visibility, and there's always a few thousand souls circling around until it's their turn to land. In fact, you might have to come back to . . ."

Bascomb didn't wait for the finish of this bit of cheer. As he tottered into the corridor, a wave of grisly horror swept over him. He finally understood; and the vista of centuries of surly receptionists and flights through space opened before him . . .

* * *

His Most Diabolical Majesty roared with laughter as he pointed a horny finger at the grey face of J. Fromshire Bascomb, as it appeared upon his televise. "Tell me, Asmodeus," he chortled to his aide, "is this not the best damned punishment I have yet devised?"

THE END

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By THOMAS M. DISCH

A fable which proves, among other things, that truly avant-garde art need not be abstract. On the contrary.

the return of the medusae

THERE were better things to do immediately afterward and fewer people. The stones were heavy and often decorative where they were, like the little boy who had climbed on the back of the library lion. Nor is it true that none were moved. Beds and public washrooms were emptied, even the smaller cafes. The necessities in short. On the other hand, the theatres and subway stations, Yankee stadium and the then new Philharmonic hall weren't touched: immense *tableaux vivants* with occasional bouquets brightening the general gray, left by some relative or friend who had been asleep at the time. In the beginning the stones were commemorative.

Iconoclasm was a phenomenon of later years. Beggars, the deformed, the least tasteful pairs of lovers and most of what remained in the hospitals were demolished, not to speak of the tons of less inspiring matter. We of a more enlightened age may be shocked by their prodigality, but we must remember that the stones were everywhere then. Obstructions! Nor was iconoclasm an unmixed evil. For every figure of exquisite pathos or erotic loveliness ground into cement, there were a score of mediocre and inept forms that even the cleverest of modern sculptors could not have refashioned.

Imagine what it was like to live then. Familiar bodies,—friends and lovers, parents that would never age and children that had never grown,—planted haphazardly about the house or in the streets, frozen perhaps in the rictus of laughter or, worse, in some moment utterly without expressiveness; the streets jammed with random statues and littered with fragments, the rubbage in the broken elevators, a relentless processional, appalling in its

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magnitude. Rather than scold the iconoclasts, we should be grateful to the visionaries who could see the aesthetic possibilities dormant in these million stones. In the age of Midas the eye that is sensitive to gold is rare indeed.

Our artists today protest that the Age of Gold is past. Some are turning to new media. Others add their nuances to old masterpieces. A few follow in the footsteps of the masters, but even they complain that their raw material is gross and insipid: another *Spectator*, an *Automobile Driver*, an occasional *Amor and Psyche*. Where, they ask, are the *Epileptics*, and *Wresters*, the *Bacchantes* of yesterday?

Are we right in wishing for the return of the Medusae? It is a hard question to answer. Was that last instant of consciousness devoid of sensation as some insist? Was it the Beatific Vision? Or, as the old myth has it, an agony of horror? Only the eyes would reveal that, and eyes glazed with marble reveal nothing.

In any case, this is mere speculation and wishful thinking. We do not know if the Medusae will return, or when.

MASTER SAID-AND-DONE

"You are damned!" the Devil gloated.

"I am damned!" the hunchback said.

But his third wish was both salvation

and repentance. A Gothic tale . . .

GUNTER, among many other deprivations physical and social, was a hunchbacked mute, and the most wretched villein on the most ill-favored manor in the far-flung estates of the powerful Lord Fl—e. Moreover, he had no last name.

For want of else better, religion was his only consolation. He knew that an eternity of bliss would follow his short day of misery, and this knowledge robbed his misery of bitterness. Being mute, Gunter was barred from the religious life. Hearing the Mass, his throat ached with his longing to join in the responses, but this, after all, was a light cross to bear. Though sim-

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ple and unschooled, he had been instructed by his heart in the principles of the *Imitatio*. No man knew less of this world's good than Gunter, but with him Gunter offered to share even his little.

It was only natural, therefore, that Gunter should have extended his charity to the crippled friar passing by that afternoon. Sitting in the furrow under the midsummer sun, the misshapen friar ate his host's bread and berries and told him, in a rich, bass voice, of the glorious cathedrals one could see, traveling through the South. Gunter was not curious about the great world outside Lord Fl—e's manor, but conversation was a rare and welcome pleasure for the ugly mute. The friar offered a *pater noster* in thanksgiving for the meal. Gunter bent his head devoutly, not knowing that the friar was reciting the prayer backward.

A dark cloud passed over the sun and a great wind sprang up from the East. The mute wrapped his rags closely about his deformed body.

The friar laughed strangely. "Do you know with whom you haved dined, Hump?"

Gunter smiled back, as he always did when people laughed at him.

"Have you not heard, then of Master *Dicis-et-non-facis?*"

Gunter shook his head.

"Of Abaddon? No! Then, surely, you know Old Nick."

Gunter crossed himself. The friar stepped back a pace.

"No more of that or I cannot stay to tell you of the three wishes."

Gunter had heard tell of the Deceiver's bag of tricks. He knew already of the three wishes.

"Take just one wish, Gunter. A single wish can't damn you."

Gunter stared into the eyes of Master *Dicis-et-non-facis*. Even in the deep shadow of the friar's cowl, even with the sun so shrouded by clouds that midday was like night, those eyes were alight with terrible fires.

"Would you like to speak, Gunter? Would your first wish be *a voice as strong and eloquent as mine?*"

That had been his wish. He had willed it, and he nodded his consent.

The friar's laughter mingled with the thunder's roar.

"Father of Lies!" Gunter shouted over the devil's laughter. "Damn you! Back to hell's stithy, Abaddon!"

The friar disappeared. Gunter sank to his knees, but his lips, eloquent as the devil himself, would not move in prayer.

"Oh, I am damned," the hunchback cried. "I am desperate."

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II

THE poor priest who heard Gunter's confession could not grant him absolution. He had no doubt his tale was true, for Gunter was a mute from birth, and now he spoke like a man of the cloth.

"You must confess yourself to the Bishop," the poor priest whispered. "Only he can absolve this sin."

Gunter left the estates of Lord Fl—e that night. On his journey, he passed the long hours by telling his beads silently or singing ballads of his own invention.

The Bishop was horrified at Gunter's tale. "There can be only one penance for such a sin," he told Gunter. "You must enter a monastery and take a vow of perpetual silence. You must not raise your voice even in praise of God. Bow your head to receive absolution, but never speak again."

Gunter bowed his head, but his heart rebelled. Leaving the cathedral, he encountered the friar, dressed now like a young nobleman, in bright silks and rich velvets, with golden spurs that jingled as he limped up to the hunchback.

"Good-day, Gunter. Are you ready to make a second wish?"

The hunchback was resolutely silent. The monastery to which the Bishop had recommended him was several miles distant.

"If you have a long way to go, we can ride the air. It's much the quickest way. Otherwise, I'll just hobble along at your side."

As the strange pair made their way along the track through the forest, Master *Dicis-et-non-facis* sang the songs of Provence and Italy. Unfortunately, Gunter's ill-won eloquence extended to other languages. He blushed at certain jests in the songs. Gunter respected Woman and dreaded her; he had never laughed at one.

"Never knew that, eh Hump? No, I thought not."

The next melody was of even more delicate beauty; its sentiments were unspeakable. Is that what it was like? Gunter wondered.

The devil laughed. "A lusty song, Gunter."

Gunter realized that *he* had sung the last song.

"Your second wish. . . ."

The song still ringing in his ears, he answered, "I wish I were young and handsome. . . . and wealthy. That is my second wish."

"That's more than one wish, but you began badly. We'll let it go." He snapped his fingers. "Easier done than said."

Gunter was no longer a hunchback. He was a young man of ethereal (if somewhat dark) beauty. His vestments, identical

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to those of his tempter, were of the richest fabric. His purse was heavy. Master *Dicis-et-non-facis* vanished with a faint tinkle of his golden spurs. But no, it was Gunter's own spurs that made that noise.

III

THERE were terrible dreams. Fasting only made them worse. The Whore appeared to him in a thousand guises. She allured, she bewitched, she commanded. But always the Doors of Love proved mere Hellgates. He woke, weeping in despair. He could not call on the Lord then for comfort; the Holy Name would not pass his lips.

He had been one year in the wastelands, and, before that, many years in the wastes of sin. Youth did not desert him. Penance blanched his skin and hollowed his eyes. It had whittled his flesh to scantness, but it had not dimmed his beauty. Nor had it killed his appetites. Even in daylight, under the blinding sun and dizzy with hunger, the Whore visited him. While he prayed, he heard her songs. He whipped his back with briars, but her cool fingers would rub his wounds with unguents afterward. His scarred flesh was beautiful, as a painting of St. Sebastian is beautiful.

Her songs were beautiful. And she was beside him night and day. He cried, "Leave me, Abaddon. Rinse these gifts from me in the quicklime of hell."

But he could not pray, except in his heart, and then her soft moaning sounded in the air, the parody of a sacred song.

"Depart from me, Accursed One," he sobbed, flinging wide his pale, young arms. But this gesture was as suggestive of an embrace as of rejection.

"Then, come. Come, Tormentor. Bring the bonds of my damnation, if it must be that."

He appeared. No longer did he wear the mask of human nature. Horned, hooved, and taloned; his black flesh crusted with burns and caked with ice. His face was horrible. Only his two eyes were the same. They burned with a terible intensity, as Tantalus before his feast.

"Do you renounce all hope of your salvation?"

"You know I do. I have."

"Your third wish then, quickly."

"First, tell me—who is she?"

The devil laughed. Gunter's thin body trembled in the icy blast.

"She! But surely, Hump, you know her?"

"The Virgin?" Gunter whispered in horror.

The laughter became screams of joy.

"Not *that* one exactly. She is the youngest daughter of Lord

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Fl—e. She lives in a convent only a few leagues distant."

"My third wish," Gunter said decisively, "is immortality."

"That gift," the devil replied, "is yours already."

"That is my terror. I wish to live *on this Earth* until the last loud angelic blast of trumpets fills the burning sky: forever young, forever wealthy; forever handsome and eloquent."

"Seal our compact with your blood," the devil commanded.

Gunter extended his hand; the devil slashed his palm open with a flick of his talon.

"You are damned," the devil shouted.

"I am damned."

"You are mine."

IV

THE violated body of the young virgin lay under the broken canopy of the shrine to which she had run for protection. The last obscure ray of daylight had vanished from the chapel. Now there was only the red glow of the sanctuary lamp, which made the bloodstains on the dead girl's wimple seem even more pitiful.

Gunter had never found pleasure in his sins. Repentance no longer was possible for him. The false syllogism of despair—"Sate they soul with blasphemy, till pain grows dull with use"—possessed him. He ran amuck in the chapel, hacked at the wooden statues with his jeweled sword, shattered the ciborium, threw the chalice to the ground and crushed it under his heel. Now, at last, he could speak the Holy Name. But in what dire accents! with what bestial reference!

The guards that seized him trembled in terror at his demonic strength.

The powerful Lord Fl—e would not even look upon the malefactor.

"Take ropes and lower him into the oubliette. The cistern may provide his food. Fill the shaft above with rubble. Let him live there as long as God wills."

No doubt some of you will be upset by the tale that follows. We don't care. It is entirely too fascinating, fantastic, original, stunning, delightful, and bitter a bit of modern myth-making for any of you to miss.

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the Enchanted Prince, 1963

ONCE there was a princess, the Princess Dowager, who lived in a castle, and both of her parents were dead. A Council of State had appointed as Regent a cruel maternal uncle who liked nothing better than dropping the Princess' kittens, one by one, into cauldrons of boiling tar kept in readiness on the tip-top parapet of the castle. He also broke the Princess' fingers, one by one, cracking them with a ruler.

He prided himself on being a disciplinarian of the old school. Often he would push her down the great spiral staircase of the castle. "Lazybones!" he would call out after her on such occasions. Or, "I hope this teaches you something."

But he was a good Administrator. His welfare program was universally admired among the more advanced nations, and since it was a period of national emergency, the Council of State let him have his way with the education of the Princess Dowager.

One day the Princess was summoned before her cruel uncle in the throne room.

"Well, Lovie," he said to her roughly, "Today is your ninth birthday. Happy birthday."

The Princess wept bitterly but made no reply.

"It's time for you to begin school. This country is proud of its fine schools. It is a privilege to be able to go to schools like ours."

The Princess cast her eyes about in terror but made no reply.

"Besides, you'll need a good education when you come to the throne. They'll teach you to count to ten. You'll learn the decimation system. They'll teach you to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Social dancing. History. No end of things."

The Princess screamed soundlessly but made no other reply. She knew very well why her cruel uncle wanted to send her to school. It was an integrated school. There would be pickaninnies in her classes. She might be murdered. Or worse.

It was a fate that she was helpless to avert and the very next day she set off to school in an integrated school bus, where she sat by herself in the very front seat, waving a cambric handkerchief sadly at the kittens, who watched her departure from the parapet of the castle.

Everybody behaved very politely to the Princess that morn-

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ing. The teacher bowed and the children curtsied. The little pickaninnies sang a song. The Princess learned to count to five apples at her first arithmetic lesson. She led the class in follow-the-leader. She began to think her fears were groundless. She reflected on the equitable welfare measures initiated by her cruel uncle.

Then it happened.

A BELL rang, symbolizing the end of the Princess' first day at school. The children scampered out of the dun-colored classroom. The Princess remained in her seat, staring thoughtfully at the monogram embroidered on her cambric handkerchief. A dark shadow fell across the handkerchief.

He was twelve years old and black as sin. It is a well-known fact that those indigenous to tropical and sub-tropical climates mature at an early age.

The precocious pickaninny handed the Princess an apple stolen from the arithmetic lesson. Automatically, she counted it: One.

"You're pretty," the pickaninny said. "Will you marry me?"

"I am white," the Princess Dowager returned pointedly.

"I am a Negro," he said. But he claimed to be, in fact, a prince of his own people, metamorphosed to his present sorry state by the enchantments of an evil stepmother.

"When I am first kissed by True Love," the Prince explained, "I will be restored to my proper form and color. How long I have waited for you to come!"

The Princess thought how like their cases were and consented.

"You must meet my uncle," she said in a burst of enthusiasm.

The enchanted prince and the Princess Dowager retired to the cloakroom where there was a tidy Tuckaway bed belonging to the teacher (who was terribly underpaid, considering the years of college training required by his profession.) There, on the tidy Tuckaway bed, the couple were joined in wedlock and the Prince received the kiss of True Love.

Next morning when the cock crew, the Princess woke. The air was filled with the sound of wedding bells. The Princess watched a gay entourage wend its way down the hillside from the castle. Her cruel uncle led the wedding party, wearing his ceremonial police uniform and carrying a bouquet of red and white roses for the newly-wed Princess Dowager. Behind her cruel uncle came the procession of maids-of-honor glowing with all the colors of spring.

(*Continued on page 128*)

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Cornie on the Walls

— By SIDNEY VAN SCYOC

Illustrator SCHELLING

Through the viewports and the pickups,
he saw and heard her—coming through the walls,
gliding over the floors.
His dear, blood dripping girl.

SOMETIMES she looked at him from his own walls, with monkey bright eyes and pensive face. He knew she couldn't be there, but she was, fleetingly.

Sometimes he saw a glow, a passing of light, on a far wall. When he focused on it, it was gone, but he knew it had been Cornie, watching.

Sometimes she came to his chamber floor. She came thin, a stick drawing of herself, then grew and flowed until she was a monstrous Cornie drawn over the entire chamber floor. All he could do when that happened was close his viewports, because wherever he looked, in the kitchen, in the service halls, in her quarters, there she spread, her hair, her foot, something of her.

Sometimes he heard her footsteps coming down the service hall, approaching Central Control where he lay paralyzed, desensitized, and wired into Central Control Panel. Once when he looked he saw only a shadow on the wall, fading.

But now the bell was ringing, singing through his halls as Cornie had sung. He made the thought necessary to view the singer. She had a bull's massive high shoulders, hair of rusted fine wire, and someone had thumbed her nose down. She glared into his viewport as if he had been that someone.

He slid the door anyway and murmured her in. She stalked his hall, glowering at the good pictures he thought on the walls.

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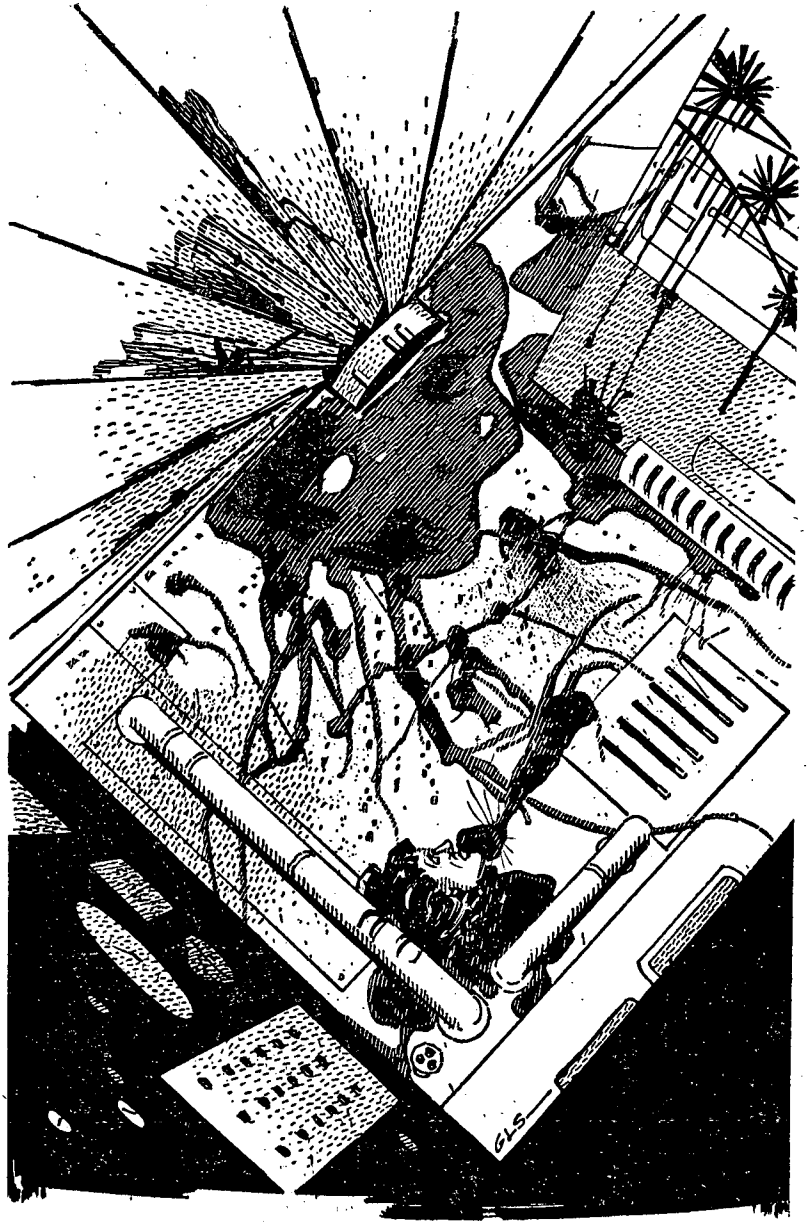

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Reaching the main chamber, she dropped heavy and uncompromising to the settee, which sat in the center of the otherwise bare room. Her voice was a fingernail drawn across rusting screenwire. "You the one wants a housekeeper?"

His speakers murmured, "I am." Unhappy violin talked around his words, because his reasons for wanting a housekeeper were sad ones. "Unfortunately my wife—"

"Here I come clean across town and against my better judgement," she said, "and you play music."

The violin died. So did his voice.

"Well, you want to see my papers?" She thrust them at the nearest viewport.

SIGHING, he examined them. She was qualified and highly recommended, and he was weary of interviews. But he did not want her.

"Well?" she said.

He sighed again. He would compromise. He would take her, if she would satisfy the one condition which could make her presence tolerable.

He stated his condition, as nicely as he knew how.

Alas, his voice hung lame.

"Not for any job," she hissed when she could purple and swell no more.

She was so angry she would not look at the good pictures he thought for her, pictures of her rewiring Central Control with smooth plastic hands, smiling for the tourists with a smooth plastic face, polishing his floors in a lithe plastic body.

"You want a good dependable housekeeper, okay," she said. "You want a female to show off, get one's already fit for it. You listen. You let them freeze up your God-given body and program you into one made by the sinful hand of man, you condemn your everlasting soul."

"You must consider—"

"There's some consider this you're doing sinful too," she said darkly. "I figure as long as you stay in your own body, it's your business whether you got wires running out your head and tubes going in your stummik."

"Surely—"

"I got the papers," she said. "Do I get the job?"

He hesitated. "I'm sorry," he said. "In your present condition—"

She was up and stalking. He was relieved to slide the door after her. "You decide you want a good, dependable housekeeper, you know where to call," she cried back.

He was alone.

He shuddered and was still, listening. Hearing nothing, he

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turned to practice, thinking upon his sensitive electronic walls and floors the intricate and shimmering scenes his mind gave him, viewing them critically, making small corrections to bring them to perfection.

Someone was watching.

Cornie.

He was working on the north wall, viewing from south viewports. He switched, stealthily, to north viewports.

She wasn't there.

She was somewhere. He knew. He felt it.

Rapidly he thought through all his viewports, click, click, click; secondary gallery, kitchen, Cornie's quarters, service halls. She was nowhere.

The bell rang. He hesitated, then thought the thought necessary to view the singer.

Cornie's friend Nora stood on his step, tight-lipped, contained too tightly by black.

It was only courteous to admit her. He slid the door, murmuring.

She acknowledged neither his greeting nor his presence, until she reached the main camber. There she stopped, gasped, raised a face darkening with anger.

Cornie was everywhere, on the walls, on the ceiling, on the floor. There were dozens of her young and bony with fine, straight black hair. But there was no monkey's gleam in her eyes, no hesitant smile at her lips She was Cornie stylized, unliving.

"How could you?" Nora cried. "You've destroyed everything that was Cornie. You've left nothing but arms and legs and nobody's face. You've killed her again."

Abruptly she collapsed to the settee, sobbing into her handkerchief. "I told her you cared for nothing but your own walls and floors," she sobbed. "I told her, and now you've taken everything she was and used her to decorate yourself."

SUDDENLY she was up, running down the service hall to pull the handled door and glare into the bladed metal interior of the Central Power Unit. She jumped back, gnawing her handkerchief. "I don't believe it," she said faintly.

So he made pictures for her on the wall beside the Unit, pictures of awkward Cornie probing into the Unit with tools she insisted she knew how to use, pictures of her dress catching on a fan blade, of her foot, as she moved to free her dress, reactivating the main switch, which she had deactivated before beginning work, pictures of her dumb and whitened face, pictures of blood and fingernails and pieces of fine, straight black hair.

Nora had the decency to run outside to be sick.

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Then she couldn't come in again. She gnawed her handkerchief and tried to put her foot over the threshold, but it would not go. Finally she left.

The dead Cornie's faded. But she was still there, somewhere.

He would purge himself of her.

He gathered himself, gathered all his power of mind. And he released himself in black pictures of torture and death. He covered his walls with death, felt certain that even his body quivered in its chamber, his body that had been surgically paralyzed the day they had wired him into Central Control.

When he was certain she was purged, he let blood and death wash down his walls into puddles which faded from his floors, leaving him clean, white and alone.

But he was not alone.

Blood dripped still from the northwest corner of the chamber, dripped and ran down the wall in a pattern which was Cornie.

He couldn't cry. His body lay paralyzed, and tears thought on sensitive walls were but a formalized expression of sorrow. Cornie, he demanded, what could I do but what I did?

The blood began to fade.

Tourists were coming.

They were three, a man, a woman, an impertinent small boy. He slid the door before they could ring. His murmuring was urgent; his hallway burst into a frenzy of color and motion. Forms grew, merged, faded, pulsed, in every color he could think. Forms shimmered, glowed. Forms became people, people forms.

NEVER had a house thought such forms for tourists. For critics, perhaps, for connoisseurs, but never for tourists. They were stunned and slow in his hall. So he thought a jungle and a jungle village in his main chamber, and he let it leak into the hall, now a native's cry, now an abstraction of zebra, running. That drew them from the hall into the scene he had created.

Ah, such a scene it was.

He viewed it with understandable pride.

Then he saw her, dripping from the same corner, dripping through the good green foliage he had made there.

The tourists hadn't seen. They were dazed by his extravagance, by life that crept through underbrush, by hunters who returned chanting with game, by kettled village fires, by women at crude looms, by the naked brown child who played at jungle's edge.

He had to hide the dripping Cornie.

A lion crept through the brush, silent and listening. The child looked up, saw the animal's ap-

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proach, puckered, began to wail. The tourists turned at the sound, turned to see the lion crouch and spring, to see the gush of baby's blood, to see the lion lope through dense vegetation, to see him run up the trunk of a leaning tree, to see the child's blood, as his body was torn, drip through the foliage to cover the Cornie dripping there.

The mother seized her child and hurried him out the door. The father stared, then backed after them.

Through the closed door he could hear the mother's scolding. He could hear the child's shrill protest, "But I wanta see the lion eat the baby!" He could hear the father plead, "Honey, they've always been okay before."

He had no time for their squabbling. He knew how to be rid of the Cornie's. Hadn't it been her fondest desire, always, to see him happy?

He thought the jungle away. He thought upon his walls the housekeeper he wanted. She was young, fit, sure, with level eyes and crisp, neat brown hair. He thought her and let her guide tourists efficiently through his rooms, let her polish in his kitchen with strong, sure hands, let her rewire Central Control with deft fingers. He let his yearning violin say, This is what I want, now that Cornie is gone.

When he looked again, Cornie was fading. A moment, and she was gone.

HE had done it. The girl on his walls began to caper, to jig. His violin fiddled, and he made copies of his own thin body to dance with her.

Then, into the eye of one dancing girl came a gleam he knew. Over the lips of another settled a sad, quivering smile. The crisp brown hair of another became fine and black.

How could she, when she knew he wanted this neat, efficient brown-haired girl instead?

She danced nevertheless on his walls, smiled her bright, tentative smile, and the other girl's body became hers, long, bony and awkward.

There was a pounding, a ringing. He channeled his thoughts to the door.

Nora flounced his hall. Inspector Woodrow of Living Houses Bureau, balding and weary, trailed behind. "Look, they told you at the office," he said. "The police investigate every case of accidental death. Thoroughly. What do you expect me to find after they've been over the place?"

"And I tell you he did it intentionally," she said. "He cares for nothing but his walls and floors. Before he was wired he tolerated her because she did not interfere with his painting. Then he

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was selected, and it was different. She was his hostess. But she had no style. She had only to step into a room and everything went awry. And when she guided tourists, she didn't treat them as worms or slugs. She took them even into the service areas, which hurt his pride, to have tourists examining his units. She explained to them everything she knew, how he was wired directly into Central Control, how he could think scenes and sounds, how he could hear and see, how the machines cared for his body. They listened more to her than they looked at him, so he killed her."

Woodrow glared at the fading Cornie's. "You have no new evidence then?" he said. "You dragged me here for words only?"

"Haven't I given you a motive?" she demanded.

He sighed heavily. "You have not. A motive is love, money—"

"He cares nothing for money!" she cried. "Don't you see? He lives for his walls and his floors. Money is nothing!"

"You take a unique view of the human situation," he said. "You must tell me more, when I have no houses to inspect." He turned to go.

She caught his sleeve. "He could have short circuited," she said. "He could have shut himself down and saved her."

He removed her hand. "Short circuiting, since you seem to have skipped your homework, is roughly comparable to self-induced convulsions followed by complete unconsciousness. Not an easy state to achieve voluntarily." He stalked out the door.

"But he's shorted before. She used to tell me."

He didn't turn.

"No one cares," she cried after him. "He murders in cold blood, and no one cares."

Then they were gone.

So was Cornie.

She was nowhere. He switched from viewport to viewport, click, click, click.

It was no use beginning anything. She would come to interrupt.

She did not come.

BUT every time he decided, Now I can make scenes, now I can speak with my violin, he thought he felt her beginning to come.

Then, as if the sun had penetrated a dark corner of his mind, he remembered what he had known all along. She *couldn't* come, not of her own volition. Only he could draw her from his walls and floors, because only he could draw anything from his walls and floors.

He had been bringing her himself. Not consciously, but she had come from his own mind.

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It was with difficulty that he refrained from making celebration on his walls. For to be rid of her he had only to vow, solemnly; From this moment I will never again remember—

He was careful not to remember who it was he would not remember.

Having vowed, he sat quietly and walled her, a faceless someone, into a single, closed chamber of his mind.

But he had made a mistake. He had not decided what to remember in her place. If he wiped away her very existence, did he not wipe away a considerable portion of his own existence too? Couldn't he safely remember that she had existed, that she was now gone, without going on to remember the details—her face, her body.

He made black pictures on a secret wall, trying to decide. He pretended she had never existed. Painstakingly he remembered all the details of the bachelor life he had lived. But it was futile. She *had* existed.

He tried to remember instead the life he had lived with someone who had not been Cornie. That too was futile. He too carefully endowed the other woman with all the traits Cornie had not possessed. Everything she was reminded him of what Cornie had not been.

HE was still deciding when the students came. They were a dozen, with notebooks and their own folding chairs. They clattered into his chamber and their zealot instructor darted among them arranging their chairs in a semi-circle facing the south wall.

But when he made his designs they sat sullen because each was convinced that he could do as well, given the opportunity, and each resented not being given the opportunity. Their wooden faces irritated him. Their presumption in coming to sit sullen infuriated him. He couldn't restrain himself. His speakers growled. His walls burst into flame. The chamber grew hot and crackling with his anger.

The flames purified him, burned away anger and inhibiting anxiety, left him leaden with unexpressed urgency. He thought advanced designs, feverishly. He covered himself, from service halls to front door, with intricate, difficult designs, worked them into complex scenes which grew, faded, glowed, until he dissolved them back into designs and from those designs brought new scenes. Color and action tumbled from his mind, crowded against themselves and each other on his walls.

He covered himself with scenes that told of everything he knew. He brought scenes that told all of

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life and death. He brought scenes of love, fury, pain and death.

Never had a house made such scenes for students, never for such a small and undistinguished group, never with such lack of restraint.

At last he was spent. He let his walls blank. He sank into a dumb, half-conscious state.

The instructor's face twitched. "Questions?" he snapped.

The students blinked stupidly. Then a knobby tall boy cleared his throat and stood. "Sir, perhaps I'm speaking out of turn, but what if he should work himself into a breakdown?" he said.

The instructor scowled. "Perkins," he said coldly, "this man is linked directly into a care system devised to control and eliminate any physical condition not requiring drastic surgery. He enjoys better health than anyone in this room. If you have no intelligent question, be seated."

Perkins lowered his knobby head. "I meant a mental breakdown, sir."

The instructor stared, unbelieving.

"Insanity, sir," Perkins muttered.

That was when he saw her. She was staring into his viewport, a tall, bony girl with a frightened small smile beginning to quiver at her lips.

"We will forget you said that, Perkins."

"But sir, I noted a definite preoccupation with blood, death and the end of all things. Perhaps I misinterpreted but—"

"There is no question of insanity!"

Perkins lowered his head. "Sir, you always tell us not to close our minds."

She was staring directly at him. Her eyes were the wise, bright eyes of a monkey.

She knew.

SHE knew he could have shorted, as he had shorted every other time her inaptitude had placed her in serious danger. She knew he had restrained himself when every instinct had cried for him to short. She knew he had deliberately let her die.

"There is no question," the instructor said emphatically.

"But sir, don't you feel that an individual isolated from normal human contacts, wired into a setup like this and all his senses cut off, getting everything secondhand through viewports and mikes, might become more susceptible to mental illness than —"

"Perkins, I shall forget everything."

Her blood had begun to drip down his walls. Wherever it dripped it became a small Cornie. Each small Cornie screamed in a small voice and bled, and where she bled there was another Cor-

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nie. His walls covered themselves. His rooms filled with her screams.

"Sir!" Perkins exclaimed in horror.

The instructor gulped. "Class dismissed!" Cornie drowned his words. Gesturing wildly he herded his open-mouthed students to the door.

The girl and Perkins remained. The girl smiled Cornie's pleading bright smile, and her eyes were swimming. Every Cornie on his wall smiled back at her. Every Cornie laughed softly, mockingly, though Cornie had never mocked. The girl choked, gasped, and she too began to laugh, a shrill, hurting laugh. Perkins seized their chairs and pulled her to the door.

Outside her laughter died. She choked and gasped again. She threw her head back. She screamed and screamed. Perkins dropped the chairs, slapped her twice, hard. When she collapsed to his shoulder he hurried her to the bus, leaving the chairs behind.

What could I do? he wanted to cry after her. You were awkward and bony. You wore squaw dresses with silver rickrack, and your hair was cut ragged. You were a monkey in my halls. You couldn't make my kitchen shine or my floors glow. You couldn't repair or rewire without disaster. You dripped solder, dropped tools, made connections that never held. Yet when I wanted to hire a professional housekeeper, you cried. You insisted you could do it yourself. But you banged my walls with cleaning equipment, seared my countertops with hot pans, let tourists smoke in my rooms.

WHAT could I do? You smiled at each man wistfully, as if you were his small child whom he had not loved enough, at each woman the same, and everyone let you have his heart. They listened to you with indulgent smiles and gentle faces. They lingered at the door with questions, just to hear your voice.

They never saw me for you.

What could I do? he wanted to cry. I loved you. Yet you asked every tourist, every critic, every student to love you too, asked with your smile, your eyes, your shy, whispering voice.

I knew you really asked their love for me. I knew you asked them to enjoy and remember and appreciate me.

But when you were here, they never saw me.

Now you know. I let you die.

Come back.

But the bus left, and she didn't glance back as it went.

Had she understood? Had she heard?

The other Cornie's faded. He was alone.

Then she was coming up the

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walk. She didn't look at all like herself. She was blonde and dumpy with pale eyes, but he knew it was her.

He slid the door joyously. "You understood! You came" His violin frolicked around his words.

She frowned into his viewport. "I heard you needed a housekeeper," she said warily.

"But I'll need no one, now that you've come. Drip solder, drop tools, set hot pans on my counters. I don't care."

"I've got all my licenses and very good recommendations," she said, still more warily. "I'm a graduate of Granly-Hopkins School of Living-House Care."

"I know. I remember. You brought your slides and tapes from school each evening. We watched and listened, you on the settee and I from Central Control. I explained to you the care and construction of a living house. You rumpled your ragged hair and could understand nothing. But I don't care."

He told her other things too. But she backed away, turned and ran down the walk. He cried after her. She ran anyway.

She would come again. He knew she would.

A busload of tourists came. She wasn't with them, and he wouldn't slide his door. "No," he said. He knew she would be back.

She was, often. Sometimes she came alone, sometimes several of her came together. Sometimes she came with a man or men or with children. But she wouldn't come through his door. He welcomed her. He told her all the things he remembered. He pleaded, "Don't you remember too?" But she wouldn't come.

After a few days more and more of her came. She stood in groups, with men, with children, with women who weren't her. Sometimes the others whispered or laughed, but she didn't. Sometimes the others said, "Mad house" and tittered. But she didn't.

Once the instructor returned with Perkins. Their faces were grave. The instructor pressed the bell.

She wasn't with them. "No," he said.

"Sir—" Perkins ventured.

"He is tired. He has exhausted himself. There is no question of insanity," the instructor said.

She wasn't with them. "No," he said.

THE END

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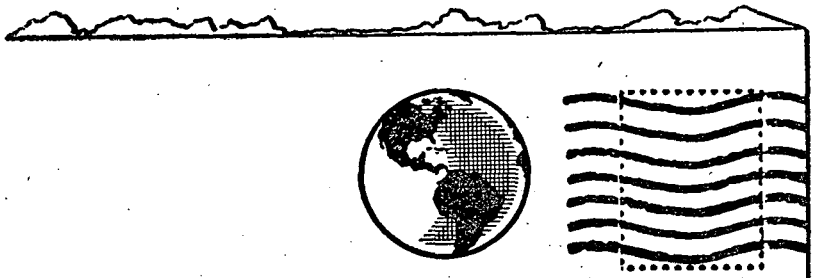

According to you...

Dear Miss Goldsmith:

Well I've gone and done it now. I've subscribed to FANTASTIC. Why? Well among other things the terrific bargain that you offered in the May issue. One full *year for half price.* If that isn't the greatest buy in the field I don't know science fiction.

I suppose another factor is the improved artwork in the last few issues. I think that the addition of Coye to your staff is one of the best moves yet. I think, though, that he is being wasted in AMAZING, I mean that he just doesn't have the style for science fiction. Fantasy yes, but sf? Never.

I suppose that the biggest factor ever was the improved quality of the stories over the past six months. I mean that if you keep this up between now and DisCon voting time and FANTASTIC is on the final ballot for the Hugo, you'll have my vote.

I would now like to set a beef before these so-called "purists" who believe that only science fiction should receive the Hugos. I nominated Jack Sharkey's "It's Magic, You Dope!" for the Hugo, and so did a lot of my fellow-fantasy fans. I mentioned it to a *friend of mine in Chicago.* I will not mention his name, but he will know who he is if he sees this. The following are two paragraphs from two letters that he sent me. Please send all time-bombs to me, which I'll forward to my friend.

"'It's Magic, You Dope!' for the Hugo? Never. Come now, that isn't even sf. Sure he fancies that the other universe has different laws—but still, magic is fantasy, no matter if the word has fan in it or not."

The next letter, dated one month later, goes like this:

"I apologize. 'It's Magic, You Dope!' may win the Hugo if only for its absurdity. Like—didn't 'That Hell-bound Train' get one? And isn't *it* fantasy?"

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Well after those 2 letters I wrote him some replies that cannot be reprinted. Where do these high and mighty sf addicts get off telling us fantasy fans that the Hugos are off-limits to us. Fantasy fans, stand up for your rights.

Scott Kutina
16309 Marquis Ave.
Cleveland 11, Ohio

● *Technically, Hugos can go to* either *sf or fantasy. But did anyone ever suggest a special award for a strictly fantasy novel and/or short story, to be on a par with the Hugos? We could call them Shelleys, after Mary Shelley, who wrote Frankenstein.*

Dear Editor:

I must protest against your cover story for May. I refer to "Devils in the Walls" by John Jakes. As I read this story I kept searching desperately for some glimmer of originality or humor, but in vain. Brak the Barbarian seems to be a combination of King Arthur, Robin Hood, Abraham Lincoln, Tarzan, and Gary Cooper. He is brave, christian and uneducated, wields a semi-magical sword, gives to the poor, is against slavery, subdues leopards, and faces a multitude of adversaries with taciturn courage. Of course his strength is superhuman and he is pure of heart. Great God, that was trite five hundred years ago!

What I can't understand is why you made this catastrophe your cover story when there were better stories in the issue.

John Pendergrast
Williamstown, Mass.

● *Well, we could answer you by saying that Brak's archetype is a universal myth hero, and as such has a strong appeal to our racial memory centers. Or we could answer you by saying we meant the story to be read as a not-so-subtle satire on the sword-and-sorcery "Conan" type of writing. Or we could say—which is more true—that we liked the story. Sorry you didn't.*

THE ENCHANTED PRINCE, 1963

(*Continued from page 114*)

The bridal party formed a ring about the school entrance and waited breathlessly to receive the Princess and her new husband. A carillon of bells rang out the tune of "Young Love."

The Princess Dowager, in organdy and white tulle with a veil of Brussels lace, tripped down the school steps toward her cruel uncle, smiling seraphically. And, only a few steps behind her, her husband came hopping out of the school.

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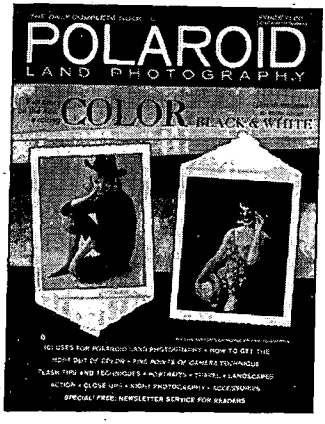

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